

# What Head Start or Child Care Programs Should Know About Shigella

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## What is *Shigella*?

Shigellosis is a very contagious diarrheal disease caused by bacteria called *Shigella*. *Shigella* causes about 500,000 cases of diarrhea in the United States annually.

## What are the Symptoms of *Shigella* Infection?

Symptoms of *Shigella* infection typically start 1–2 days after exposure and include:

- Diarrhea (sometimes bloody)
- Fever
- Abdominal pain
- A painful sensation of needing to pass stools even when bowels are empty.

## How does *Shigella* Spread?

*Shigella* spreads when people put something in their mouths or swallow something that has come into contact with stool of a person infected with *Shigella*. This can happen when:

- Contaminated hands touch your food or mouth.
- Hands can become contaminated through a variety of activities, such as touching surfaces ) that have been contaminated by stool from an infected person. (e.g., toys, bathroom fixtures, changing tables, diaper pails
- Hands can also become contaminated with *Shigella* while changing the diaper of an infected child or caring for an infected person.
- Eating food contaminated with *Shigella*. Food may become contaminated if those who are preparing food have *Shigella* infection.
- Drinking water that was contaminated by infected fecal matter, and using recreational water, such as wading pools and sensory tables that is contaminated.
- *Shigella* germs are present in the stools of infected persons for up to two weeks after the diarrhea has gone away.

## Who is at Risk?

Young children are the most likely to get *Shigella* infections, but people from all age groups are affected. Many outbreaks are related to child care settings and schools. *Shigella* spreads from young children to their family members and others because it is so contagious.

## Implications for Head Start and Child Care Programs

Programs should review their emergency plans and staff availability to ensure adequate coverage, if needed.

## Should a Child Infected with *Shigella* be Excluded from Head Start or Child Care?

- Diarrhea is defined by watery or loose stools that are not associated with changes of diet.
- Exclusion is required for all diapered children whose stool is not contained in the diaper and toilet-trained children if the diarrhea is causing soiled clothing.
- In addition, diapered children with diarrhea should be excluded if the stool frequency exceeds two or more stools above normal for that child.
- Readmission after diarrhea can occur when diapered children have their stool contained by the diaper (even if the stools remain loose) and when toilet-trained children are continent.
- State and local health departments may require additional conditions to be met before children infected with *Shigella* are permitted to return to childcare (e.g., they may require a note from a health provider, one or more laboratory test to show that the infection has passed).

## How can Providers Limit the Spread of *Shigella* Infection?

- [Follow diapering procedures that will minimize exposure to germs that cause diarrhea](#)
- Make sure to clean and disinfect toys.
- Make sure all children and adults use good hand washing techniques – including scrubbing with soap for 20 seconds. Soap and water is preferred.
- Children who have recently recovered from *Shigella* infection can be grouped together in one classroom to minimize exposing uninfected children and staff.
- Assign separate staff to diapering versus food prep.
- Reassign adults with diarrhea to jobs that minimize opportunities for spreading infection, such as desk work and not food preparation. State and local health regulations may require adults with shigellosis to refrain from working in childcare while ill.
- During *Shigella* outbreak, stop water play.

## How to talk to Children about *Shigella*?

- If children have questions, take time to listen and answer their questions.
- Be honest. Answer questions based on the facts and as age-appropriate.
- Speak in a calm tone of voice, using reassuring words.
- Emphasis hand washing and toilet hygiene.

## Where Can I Learn More?

- [Tips for Caregivers, Parents, and Teachers on talking with children about infectious disease outbreaks](#)
- [Managing Infectious Diseases in Child Care and Schools, A Quick Reference Guide](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control Shigella](#)
- [Managing Infectious Disease in Head Start](#)