

### When can I have sex again?

If you have diarrhoea, stomach cramps or fever, avoid sex with another person until you get the all clear from a health professional.

You should not resume having sex until at least 7 days after complete resolution of diarrhoea. Shigella can be found in the stool for up to 6 weeks after your symptoms have resolved.

### How can I prevent myself from getting shigella?

You can lower your risk of getting shigella during sex by:

- washing hands (buttocks, groin and penis too, ideally) or showering before and after sex
- avoiding licking the skin on the buttocks, around the backside or groin, as they may carry the bacteria
- changing condoms between anal and oral sex
- using latex gloves for fingering or fisting
- using a barrier for rimming (such as a square of latex)
- not sharing sex toys or douching equipment.

**Showering before and after sex is even better than washing!**

You can order more copies of this leaflet free of charge from [www.healthpromotion.ie](http://www.healthpromotion.ie)

Sláinte Ghnéis &  
Clár um Thoirchis Ghéarchéime  
**Sexual Health &  
Crisis Pregnancy Programme**

August 2023

  
sexualwellbeing.ie



# HE

## A guide to **Shigella**

for gay, bisexual and men who  
have sex with men (gbMSM)  
and transgender women

### What is shigella?

Shigella is a bacteria that can cause severe stomach upset.

### How do I get shigella?

The shigella bug is passed on through infected faeces (poo). This can happen through contaminated food or sexual activity.

Sexually transmitted shigella is usually seen in gbMSM when it is picked up by the bacteria getting into the mouth during sex or via unwashed hands.

Sexual activity that may involve contact with faeces (poo) is a risk, for example, anal sex, fisting, rimming, oral sex or handling a condom or sex toy used for anal sex.

Only a very small amount of the bacteria is needed to cause infection.

Someone with shigella can be infectious for up to six weeks after the symptoms have settled.

### How common is shigella?

The number of cases of sexually transmitted shigella has increased in gbMSM in the recent past in Europe, including in Ireland.

### What symptoms would I have with shigella?

Symptoms usually develop around one to three days after (sexual) contact, and last up to a week.

Symptoms may include:

- diarrhoea – this can be severe and last for a few days
- feeling sick (nausea) and vomiting
- stomach cramps
- feeling feverish
- in serious cases, diarrhoea that can contain blood and/or mucus.

### How can I be tested for shigella?

Shigella is usually diagnosed by sending a stool (poo) sample to the laboratory for testing.

If you suspect you have shigella, you should contact your GP who can organise this test.

If you picked up shigella sexually, we recommend that you also have tests for sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including chlamydia, gonorrhoea, syphilis, HIV, hepatitis B and C.

### What about my partner?

You should inform your partner(s) about your infection. Your partner is also recommended to have tests for STIs, including chlamydia, gonorrhoea, syphilis, HIV, hepatitis B and C.

If your partner has symptoms of shigella infection, they should seek immediate medical attention.

### Can shigella be treated?

Diarrhoea caused by shigella usually goes away within 5 to 7 days. People with mild infection will generally get better with fluids and rest.

Antibiotics are used to help reduce the spread of shigella to someone else and for more severe cases. Some types of shigella can be difficult to treat and sometimes people, particularly those with a weakened immune system, need to be admitted to hospital for treatment.

### Can I infect my partner or others?

You may be infectious for up to six weeks, so wash your hands with soap and warm water after using the toilet and before touching food.

### Basic hygiene: wash your hands after using the toilet!

Do not share towels; avoid using health spas, jacuzzis, hot tubs or swimming pools.

If you work in the food industry, healthcare or childcare settings, you need to stay out of work while you have symptoms. You cannot go back to work until a health professional says so.

Shigella is a notifiable disease, and so all shigella cases are notified to the local department of Public Health for investigation and follow up.

<https://www.hpsc.ie/notifiablediseases/notifyinginfectiousdiseases/>

Public health staff may be in touch to rule out a cluster or outbreak, and also to talk about restrictions required to prevent spread of infection. They may apply to you and to your close contacts, if they work with children, with food or in a healthcare setting. Some close contacts may also need to be tested.