



## Shigellosis (*Shigella dysenteriae*)

### What is Shigellosis?

- Shigellosis is a bacterial disease caused by amongst other Shigellosis species, the **bacterium** *Shigella dysenteriae*.
- Symptoms are a sudden onset of abdominal pain, cramps and diarrhoea, mucus and blood in stools and fever.
- In severe cases dehydration may occur, with a subsequent decrease in urine and kidney failure.
- The symptoms can last from a few days to one week.
- People can be infected, experience no symptoms and still spread the infection for a few weeks.
- Shigella dysenteriae* is very infectious, especially among children in day care centres or institutionalised people. As few as 10 microbes can be an infective dose.

### How is Shigellosis transmitted?

- Shigella* can be transmitted through the faecal oral route, person to person contact and the ingestion of contaminated food or water.
- Shigellosis can spread through ice cubes made from infected water.
- Shigellosis can be contracted from eating shellfish that was harvested from coastal areas situated close to sewage outfalls.

### How can Shigellosis be treated?

- To diagnose *Shigella*, stool samples have to be cultured.
- Prevent dehydration by rehydrating to recover lost fluids and salts.
- Antibiotic medicine can be used to shorten the infection period and for a quicker recovery.
- In case of kidney failure and rectal bleeding, hospitalisation might be essential.
- Day care workers and food handlers must be booked off from work until two consecutive stool samples are clean.

### How can Shigellosis be prevented?

- Always wash hands with soap and water after changing nappies, using the toilet and before Do not drink untreated water and take care to use clean drinking water containers.
- Proper sanitation, provision of clean drinking water and fly control will prevent spreading of *Shigella*.
- Disinfect drinking water by adding 1 teaspoon of domestic bleach to 20 litres of water and waiting for 1 hour before drinking it. If the water is cloudy, add another 2 to 3 teaspoons of bleach. Otherwise boil the water for 5 minutes.

Reference: DWAF (2003). Management of water-related microbial diseases, RSA

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