

# Dysentery Fact Sheet

## What is Dysentery?

Dysentery is caused by bacteria of the shigella group. The main source of the bacteria is man.

If you have Dysentery you may be experiencing the following symptoms:

- Diarrhoea is the main symptom
- Fever
- Nausea
- Cramps
- Vomiting
- Toxaemia

In a typical case, stools contain blood, mucus and pus.

Mild or asymptomatic infections can occur.

Illness is usually self-limited, lasting for several days to weeks, with an average of 4 - 7 days.

The disease is more severe in children than adults. The elderly, debilitated individuals and person of all ages suffering from malnutrition are particularly susceptible.

## Incubation period

12 - 96 hours (more usually 1 - 3 days), can be up to 1 week for shigella dysenteriae.

## Occurrence

Can occur worldwide. Illness in infants under 6 months is unusual. 40% of households, where one child is ill, can become ill.

## Transmission

The pathway of spread is by either direct faecal-oral or indirect faecal-oral route.

Individuals primarily responsible for transmission are those who fail to clean their hands or under their fingernails thoroughly after defecation. They may then spread infection to others directly by physical contact or indirectly by contaminating food.

Dogs which have ingested infected human faeces, may be the source of infection in children.

## **Communicability**

During acute infection and until the infectious agent is no longer present in the faeces, usually within 4 weeks after illness.

Asymptomatic carriers may transmit infection. Rarely the carrier state may persist for months or longer.

Appropriate antimicrobial treatment usually reduces duration of carriage to less than a week.

## **Precautionary measures**

- A strict hand washing routine using soap and hot water with thorough rinsing must be observed.
- Frequent cleansing and disinfection of sanitary accommodation must be carried out throughout the day (bleach diluted at 1 part in 10 or in accordance with the manufacturers instructions). Rubber gloves should be worn during the disinfection of the accommodation and particular attention must be paid to toilet seats, flush handles, wash hand basin taps and toilet door handles or other surfaces that might be touched. When using concentrated bleach solutions, eye protection should be worn.
- Communal drinking vessels are totally unacceptable, that is one cup shared by several individuals.
- Stress the use of sufficient toilet paper to minimise finger contamination.
- Isolation during acute illness.
- Use scrupulous cleanliness in food preparation and handling, refrigerate as appropriate, Particular attention should be paid to storage of salads and food to be eaten cold.
- It is imperative, to prevent an outbreak, that if there are any suspected cases, the Planning and Environmental Services Directorate and the doctor for the individual are informed.

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