

Gloucester City Council

Factsheet

DYSENTERY

What is Dysentery?

Dysentery is an infection of the intestines (gut). There are two types of Dysentery – Amoebic and Bacillary. This leaflet is about Bacillary Dysentery which is the commonest form and is caused by a bacteria known as *Shigella*.

Dysentery or *Shigella* is highly infectious. In the UK, most cases occur in families or where people are in close contact, such as schools, nurseries, military bases and day centres. Dysentery is common amongst young children although infection occurs in all ages after travel to areas / countries where hygiene is poor. The incubation period is usually 1-7 days.

Symptoms

- watery diarrhoea, sometimes containing blood
- feeling sick and vomiting
- abdominal pain, stomach cramps
- fever and feeling depressed

How is Dysentery spread?

Dysentery bacteria must be swallowed to cause the infection. It is spread from person to person through poor hygiene practices, for example not washing your hands correctly after using the toilet or changing nappies and also through food that has come into contact with water contaminated with human sewage, such as in countries with poor sanitation systems. The disease can be spread up to four weeks from infection into the body. This is why more severe dysentery is more common in developing countries, where water supplies and sewage disposal are inadequate or where human faeces are used as a fertilizer.

How can we prevent Dysentery?

If you are looking after someone with diarrhoea, keep contact to a minimum, you must wash your hands with soap and hot water and dry your hands thoroughly after cleaning the bathroom, helping the person use the toilet, or changing nappies or soiled sheets.



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The risk of getting Dysentery is higher when travelling in countries where the disease is common. Travellers, especially in Asia, India, Africa and South America, should avoid high risk foods and drinks as far as possible.

- Avoid raw vegetables and salads, and fruits that cannot be peeled.
- Avoid drinks with ice and ice cream.
- Sterilise tap water before drinking (e.g. boil, or use sterilising tablets), or drink carbonated bottled water.
- Be wary of food from street vendors.
- Avoid sharing towels and facecloths.
- Wash the laundry of an infected person on the hottest setting possible.
- Wash your hands before handling, eating or cooking food, handling babies and feeding the young or the elderly.

Return to Work / School

A child with Dysentery should not return to school until 48 hours after symptoms have stopped. An adult with Dysentery should avoid work and get advice from their organisation before returning to work if they are employed in a food or healthcare environment.

Summary

Common causes

- Poor hygiene
- Person-person spread
- Contaminated food and water

Prevention

- Good personal hygiene practices
- Adequate cleaning of toilets
- Avoid sharing facecloths
- When travelling avoid drinking water

Sources

http://www.hpa.org.uk/infections/topics_az/shigella/menu.htm
<http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk/articles/article.aspx>