

Dysentery

What is it?

Dysentery is an infectious disease of the large intestine, there are basically two types:

- Amoebic dysentery – this type is rare in Britain but can be contracted whilst travelling in tropical and equatorial regions of the world where it is common
- Bacterial dysentery – the form most common in Britain, is known as Shigella dysentery and caused by Shigella which is a highly contagious bacteria

What are the symptoms?

- Mild or severe diarrhoea, often containing blood and/or mucous
- Sickness
- Stomach cramps
- Fever

How can you catch it?

Very easily! It takes only a very small number of bacteria to cause the infection

- From someone else who has the infection
- From drinking water or eating food contaminated with it

How long does it last?

The illness may last for up to two weeks and the symptoms begin usually within 1 –3 days after infection

How is it treated?

Whilst you have diarrhoea, drink plenty of fluids. Antibiotics are not usually helpful in dysentery, although if you are extremely poorly you should check with your doctor

Can I give it to somebody else?

Yes, especially if you do not practice good hygiene the germ can be transferred accidentally from faeces to mouth

- Avoid unnecessary contact with people especially children and the elderly until your diarrhoea has stopped
- Avoid preparing food for other people
- Supervise young children who are using the toilet to ensure good standards of personal hygiene
- Make sure everyone at home uses their own towel
- Soiled clothes should be laundered on as hot a wash as possible, do not overfill your washing machine or it will not clean properly
- Clean and disinfect toilet seats, flush handles, door handles and taps frequently with hot soapy water/disinfectant. If you use disinfectant make sure you follow the manufacturer's instructions

When can I go back to work, school or nursery?

Anyone with diarrhoea should remain off work until they have had 48 hours without any symptoms. If your work involves handling food, nursing or working with the young, sick or elderly you must tell your employer. When you return to work you must maintain good standards of personal hygiene

What can I do to prevent getting it again?

- Wash and dry your hands before preparing food, after using the toilet and after changing a nappy
- Wash hands using soap, hot water and clean hand drying facilities.
- Disinfect the toilet bowl, toilet seat, cistern handle and washbasin tap handles regularly
- Use disposable cleaning cloths
- Do not share towels or bath water with other members of the family