

# SHIGELLA ALERT

Information for NSW Clinicians

Please distribute this information to all staff

## Key points:

1. There is an outbreak of shigellosis amongst gay men in Sydney
2. Request stool specimens in gay men with diarrhoea
3. Use culture sensitivities to guide antibiotic selection

There is an outbreak of shigellosis among gay men, predominantly in the inner Sydney area but with cases from across NSW. In the first six months of 2016, 154 cases of shigellosis were notified, which is the expected number of notifications for the full year. Of these, 120 notifications were in men, of whom half reported sex with another male during their incubation period.

There is evidence of antibiotic resistance to common antibiotics in *Shigella* isolates in NSW. Testing of 160 isolates from 2013-14 found 35% resistant to ciprofloxacin, 76% resistant to co-trimoxazole, and 37% resistant to ampicillin.(MJA 2016:204(7)).

## How does shigellosis present?

- Shigellosis is a highly infectious bacterial infection spread by the faecal-oral route
- The incubation period is usually 1-3 days, sometimes up to 7 days.
- Symptoms include diarrhoea, sometimes with mucus, pus or blood, fever, nausea, vomiting, tenesmus and stomach cramps.
- Symptoms usually last 4-7 days but sometimes longer. In immunocompromised people, including those with HIV infection, severe disease requiring hospitalisation is more likely to occur.

## How should I manage suspected shigellosis cases?

- Request stool PCR, CULTURE and SENSITIVITY on patients with diarrhoea, especially if they are gay men
- It is important to review culture sensitivity results once available. If empiric treatment is required, most isolates from this outbreak are sensitive to ciprofloxacin (500mg bd for 5 days) and norfloxacin (400mg bd for 5 days), consistent with Therapeutic Guidelines recommendations
- While shigellosis in healthy people is usually self-limiting, treatment is recommended for all patients as a method of controlling spread of the infection. *Shigella* commonly remains in faeces for 4 weeks after the acute infection, but appropriate antibiotics reduce the duration of carriage to a few days.

## What advice should I give to patients to help prevent the spread of *Shigella*?

- Thoroughly wash hands after going to the toilet, before and after having sex, and before eating or preparing food.
- Do not prepare food for others until 48 hours after complete recovery
- Do not work as a food handler, or carer for children, the elderly or patients for at least 48 hours after the symptoms completely resolve
- Avoid having sex for 7 days after symptoms completely resolve
- Ensure patients are aware of the risks of shigellosis from sexual contact, as well as other causes of gastroenteritis

## Further Information:

- Contact your local public health unit on **1300 066 055**
- NSW Health factsheet:  
<http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/factsheets/Pages/shigellosis.aspx>

Yours sincerely



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