

Shigellosis

Last updated April 2011/ Due for review June 2012

Cases of shigellosis transmitted sexually have been seen in the last few years. Many cases have involved HIV-positive gay men. A small outbreak of the infection was reported in London and similar outbreaks have been reported in the US, the Netherlands, Australia and Germany.

What is shigellosis?

Shigellosis is caused by a bacterium called *Shigella sonnei*, which is highly infectious, regardless of whether or not a person has HIV. It can cause severe diarrhoea. Symptoms can be worse in HIV-positive people who have a low CD4 cell count.

Shigella is transmitted by contact with very small amounts of human faeces (shit). This can occur as a consequence of poor hygiene, or during sex. Rimming, fingering, fisting, anal sex, handling sex toys after use in the anus, and occasionally oral sex can all carry a risk.

It makes good sense to wash your hands after sex, after using the toilet and before preparing food.

If you have severe diarrhoea you should see your doctor as soon as possible, who can check a faeces sample for *shigella*.

Shigellosis can be successfully treated with antibiotics.