

Rise in extremely drug-resistant Shigella in gay and bisexual men

Surveillance by UKHSA has detected a rise in cases of extremely antibiotic-resistant *Shigella sonnei* infections, mainly in gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men (MSM).

There have been 47 cases in the 4-month period between 1 September 2021 and 10 January 2022. This compares to 16 cases in a 17-month period the previous year – between 1 April 2020 and 31 August 2021. UKHSA has been following this strain since 2018, but recent cases show resistance to antibiotics is increasing.

Shigella is a gut infection that causes diarrhoea (sometimes mixed with blood), stomach cramps and fever. It is caused by bacteria found in faeces. Sex that may involve anal contact or contact with faeces is one way that the infection can spread. It is passed on through the faecal-oral route during sex, either directly or via unwashed hands and only a tiny amount of bacteria can spread the infection.

Symptoms are typically seen between 1 and 4 days after exposure and are commonly mistaken for food poisoning.

Shigella is very infectious. Although symptoms can be unpleasant, in most cases they will subside within a week, but some individuals need hospitalisation and require intravenous antibiotic treatment. Effective antibiotic treatments are limited for this extremely resistant strain.

Dr Gauri Godbole, Consultant Medical Microbiologist at UKHSA, said:

Practising good hygiene after sex is really important to keep you and your partners safe. Avoid oral sex immediately after anal sex, and change condoms between anal or oral sex and wash your hands with soap after sexual contact.

It's important that gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men do not dismiss their symptoms and speak to their GP or sexual health clinic, mentioning *Shigella*, if they are unwell.

Men with *Shigella* may have been exposed to other STIs including HIV, so a sexual health screen at a clinic or ordering tests online is recommended.

If you have been diagnosed with *Shigella*, give yourself time to recover. Keep hydrated and get lots of rest.

Don't have sex until 7 days after your last symptom and avoid spas, swimming, jacuzzis, hot tubs and sharing towels as well as preparing food for other people until a week after symptoms stop.

You can find out more information about Shigella and get advice on other topics at [Sexwise](#) or by calling the free National Sexual Health Helpline at 0300 123 7123.