If you have any further questions, please contact:

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Dysentery

This leaflet contains information about Dysentery
- what it is and how it affects people

1   What is Dysentery?

Dysentery is an infection of the gut usually caused in the UK by a bacterium called Shigella. Dysentery can also be caused by small microscopic organisms, causing amoebic dysentery but the only usually affects people travelling abroad.

2   Who is at risk?

Anyone can get dysentery, but it is most common in children. People who care for, or work with young children are more at risk. International travel, particularly where sanitation is poor also increases the risk of getting dysentery.

3   How do you get dysentery?

The source of the bacteria is in the faeces (stools) of infected persons, particularly those who still have diarrhoea. Spread between young children occurs easily.

4   How can you avoid getting dysentery?

- Pay particular attention to personal hygiene and wash your hands thoroughly with soap and warm water:

    - before preparing and eating any food
    - after going to the toilet or changing a baby's nappy
    - not sharing the towel of an infected person
    - paying particular attention to hand washing when dealing with young children who have diarrhoea, or may have dysentery

- Do not drink untreated water

- Do not use ice or drinking water in countries where the water supply might be unsafe

- Always wash and/or peel fruits and vegetables before eating them

- Clean toilet seats, toilet bowls, flush handles, taps and wash hand basins after use when there is a case of diarrhoea in the house

- When there is a case in the family/home make sure that everyone has their own towel and that they do not use anybody else's

- Wash all soiled clothes and linen on as hot a machine wash as possible. As much faecal matter as possible, on soiled clothing and linen, should be removed before washing. This should be flushed down the toilet. Disposable gloves should be worn and hands washed thoroughly afterwards

5   What are the symptoms of dysentery and how long do they last?

Watery diarrhoea, which may be profuse and often accompanied by abdominal pain. Prolonged diarrhoea and weight loss can occur in some cases of dysentery. The diarrhoea can last days and into a week or longer and care in hand washing must be exercised during this time

If you have concerns about your health contact NHS Direct on 0845 4647, visit their website http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

6   How do you treat dysentery?

Some types of dysentery require treatment. This will be identified from saecal samples. Most people with a healthy immune system will recover within around a month.

It is important to drink plenty of fluids as diarrhoea or vomiting can lead to dehydration and you can lose important sugars and minerals from your body. Your doctor may recommend a re-hydration solution, available from your pharmacist in more persistent cases.

- If you feel sick, try taking small sips of fluid, frequently
- Avoid tea, coffee, carbonated drinks or alcohol
- Always dilute sugary drinks even if you would not normally dilute them.

7   Do I need to stay off work or school?

Yes. While you are ill and have symptoms you are infectious. You should not return to work or school until you have been free from diarrhoea for 48 hours. You should tell your employer you have had dysentery if you work with vulnerable groups such as the elderly, the young, those in poor health, or if you handle food.

8   The Health Protection Agency and Dysentery

More information about the Health Protection Agency and dysentery is available on our website at http://www.hpa.org.uk.