Drug-Resistant Shigella Emerges in U.K. and U.S. Gay & Bi Men

The bacterial infection, passed through contact with feces, can prompt diarrhea, stomach cramps, fever, vomiting, weakness and fatigue.

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A series of cases of multidrug-resistant infection with shigella has been reported in the United States and the United Kingdom, mostly among men who have sex with men (MSM). These bacterial infections proved resistant to several first-line antibiotics but were ultimately susceptible to other treatments.

Shigella, which causes a condition known as shigellosis, is transmitted through contact with human feces and can be passed along through sexual activities, including rimming, fingering, fisting, anal sex and the use of sex toys. Symptoms, which typically develop within three days of exposure, include frequent diarrhea that lasts more than 48 hours, stomach cramps, fever, vomiting and overall weakness and fatigue.

People living with HIV who have a low CD4 count are at risk of developing a particularly serious case of Shigella infection.

Typically, the infection is treated with antibiotics such as azithromycin and ceftriaxone.

U.K. health authorities recently reported 17 cases of shigellosis, 14 of them among men. All nine recent cases reported in the United States were among MSM.

Those who develop symptoms consistent with shigellosois should consult a physician and mention the infection by name. The clinician should conduct tests for shigella infection based on a stool sample.

An indicator that an individual may have contracted the multidrug-resistant strain of shigella in question include diarrhea lasting more than a week despite antibiotic treatment.

The strain has proved susceptible to chloramphenicol, ertapenem, temocillin, mecillinam and fosfomycin.

People can reduce their risk of contracting the infection by avoiding potential oral contact with

feces and by washing their hands and showering after sex.

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