

Gut Bug After Sex

48-Hour Action and Safe-Return Checklist

Diarrhoea after sex can be a gut infection such as *Shigella*. Use this checklist to act in the first 48 hours, get the right care, and avoid passing it on. **Tick each box as you go.**

Get urgent help first

Bloody diarrhoea: ask for an urgent GP appointment or contact **NHS 111**. Get help too if you have severe pain, signs of dehydration, or symptoms that are not improving. Don't wait for this checklist to be finished.

1. Spot the signs

Symptoms usually start **1 to 3 days** after exposure, but can take up to a week. Most people recover in 4 to 5 days. Illness can last up to 2 weeks. Some people have no symptoms at all and can still pass the infection on.

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|--|---|
| ☐ Diarrhoea (it may contain blood or mucus) | ☐ Feeling sick or being sick |
| ☐ Stomach cramps | ☐ Headache or loss of appetite |
| ☐ Fever | ☐ Pain or mucus around the back passage, or lower belly pain |

Ticking boxes here is not a diagnosis. Only a lab test can show which germ is causing it, and food poisoning can look the same.

2. Your 48-hour plan

TODAY | first 24 hours

- ☐ **Pause all sexual contact**, including oral–anal contact, while you have diarrhoea.
- ☐ **Sip fluids often.** Staying hydrated is important.
- ☐ **Wash your hands** with soap after the toilet and before eating or preparing food.
- ☐ **Stay off work or school** if you're unwell. Don't prepare food for other people.
- ☐ **Write it down:** when symptoms began, what they are, any recent travel abroad, and recent partners.
- ☐ **Call your GP or a sexual health clinic.** Say it might be a gut infection from sex.
- ☐ **Check before taking anti-diarrhoea medicine** such as loperamide (Imodium). A US health department warns it can make symptoms worse. Ask a pharmacist or clinician.

DAY 2 | 24 to 48 hours

- ☐ **Give a stool (poo) sample** if the clinic asks. A lab test is how the germ is identified.
- ☐ **Ask for a full sexual health screen**, including HIV.
- ☐ **Take antibiotics only if prescribed**, and exactly as directed. Don't share them.
- ☐ **Tell recent partners** (see page 3).
- ☐ **Keep up the hygiene** even if you feel better. You can stay infectious for up to a month.
- ☐ **Start your safe-return tracker** (page 2).
- ☐ **Getting worse, bloody diarrhoea, or think you're dehydrated?** Contact NHS 111 or your GP urgently.

3. What to say, and what to ask

Many clinicians don't think of sexual transmission first, so say it clearly. Mention your sexual history and name *Shigella*.

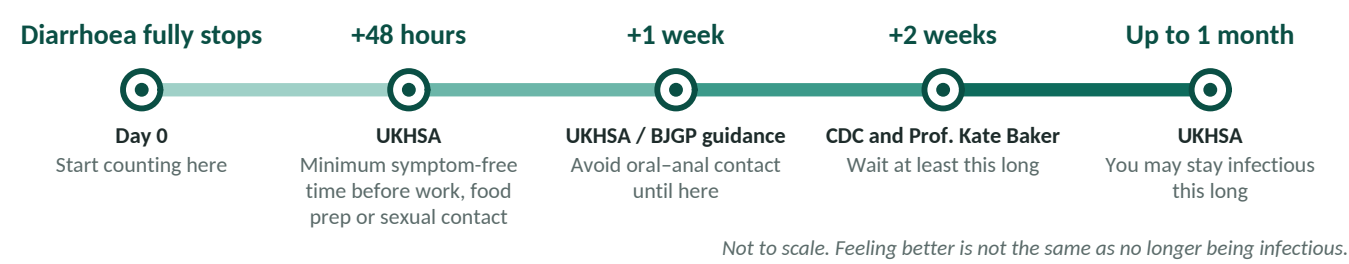
“Hello, I've had diarrhoea since [date]. I think I may have caught a gut infection through sex, possibly *Shigella*. Can I give a stool sample and have a full sexual health screen, including HIV?”

Questions worth asking

- ☐ Do I need antibiotics, and will the lab check which ones work against this germ?
- ☐ Should I be tested for other infections?
- ☐ Who should I tell, and can the clinic help with telling partners?
- ☐ Do I need to stay off work or school, and for how long?
- ☐ When is it safe for me to have sex again?

4. When is it safe to have sex again?

There is no single agreed number. Official advice ranges from 48 hours to 2 weeks because the sources measure different things. The most cautious reading is to **wait at least 2 weeks after your diarrhoea has fully stopped**, unless your clinic tells you otherwise.



Source	What it says	What it is really measuring
UKHSA (2026)	At least 48 hours symptom-free before sexual contact. You can stay infectious for up to a month.	The minimum to stop being actively unwell
BJGP / UKHSA guidance	Avoid oral-anal contact until 1 week after diarrhoea resolves.	A middle ground in clinical advice
CDC	Wait at least 2 weeks after diarrhoea ends. Germs can stay in stool for up to 2 weeks.	How long bacteria may still be shed
Prof. Kate Baker, Cambridge	No sex until two weeks after you've fully recovered.	Researcher advice aimed at stopping spread

My safe-return tracker

Date my diarrhoea fully stopped

+ 48 hours

+ 1 week

+ 2 weeks (cautious date)

5. Before you resume sex

- ☐ My diarrhoea has fully stopped, and I've waited at least 2 weeks (or my clinic has told me a different time).
- ☐ I've finished any treatment exactly as my clinician directed.
- ☐ I've had a full sexual health screen, including HIV, and I know my results.
- ☐ I've told my recent partners.
- ☐ I've washed my hands, showered, and cleaned any shared toys or equipment I plan to use.
- ☐ My clinic has said it's OK, or I've asked them and understand their advice.

6. Lower your risk during sex

These steps lower the risk. They don't remove it, and regular handwashing and food hygiene on their own are not enough to stop sexual spread.

- ☐ Wash your hands after sex, and shower if you can.
- ☐ Change condoms between anal and oral sex.
- ☐ Use gloves for fingering or fisting.
- ☐ Don't share sex toys or douching equipment.
- ☐ Use a barrier, such as a square of latex, for rimming.
- ☐ Don't have sex while you have diarrhoea.

7. Tell your partners

Some people carry the infection without feeling ill, and people with a gut infection from sex may have been exposed to other infections too. A short, calm message helps your partners look after themselves. Your clinic can help.

"Hi, I've had a stomach bug that may be a gut infection passed on through sex, possibly Shigella. It's worth watching for symptoms, and if you get diarrhoea, please see a GP or sexual health clinic and mention it. A sexual health check is a good idea too."

Find a sexual health clinic. Search "sexual health clinic" on [nhs.uk](https://www.nhs.uk), or ask your GP. You don't have to be sure it's *Shigella* to go.

Medically reviewed by [NAME, CREDENTIALS] | Version 1.0 | October 2026 | Written by [AUTHOR NAME]

Disclaimer: This checklist is general information and isn't a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. If you have bloody diarrhoea, severe pain, signs of dehydration, or symptoms that aren't improving, contact NHS 111 or your GP. For testing, contact a sexual health clinic.

Sources

1. UKHSA, "What is Shigella? How do you catch it and how can it be avoided?" (March 2026). [ukhsa.blog.gov.uk](https://www.ukhsa.blog.gov.uk)
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3. University of Cambridge, sexually transmitted diarrhoea study (July 2026). [cam.ac.uk](https://www.cam.ac.uk)
4. UKHSA, "Warning after rise in extremely drug-resistant Shigella". [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk)
5. UKHSA, "Shigella dysentery on the rise among gay and bisexual men" (stool testing advice). [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk)
6. BJGP, "Spotlight on drug-resistant Shigella: raising awareness within general practice". [ncbi.nlm.nih.gov](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov)
7. Public Health England, Shigella leaflet (2016). assets.publishing.service.gov.uk
8. California Department of Public Health, shigellosis in men who have sex with men. [cdph.ca.gov](https://www.cdph.ca.gov)
9. BASHH, UK national guideline for sexually transmitted enteric infections (2023). researchportal.ukhsa.gov.uk

Want the full explanation? Read our guide to sexually transmitted diarrhoea at thehealthrangers.com: how it spreads, what testing involves, treatment, and antibiotic resistance.