

Frequently asked questions about schistosomiasis



1. What is schistosomiasis?

Schistosomiasis is a disease caused by parasites that live in contaminated freshwater. It can affect various organs in the body and persist for decades if not detected and treated in time.

2. What are the symptoms?

They can vary from person to person, but some symptoms include:

- Episodes of abdominal pain and/or chronic pelvic pain
- Blood in urine or stool
- Urinary problems (pain when urinating) or digestive issues (constipation and/or diarrhoea)

In women and men, it can also affect sexual and reproductive health.

3. In which countries does schistosomiasis exist?

Schistosomiasis is common in regions of sub-Saharan Africa (90% of cases), but it is also present in some areas of the Middle East, Latin America and Asia, especially in places with freshwater such as rivers or lakes.

4. I have lived or travelled in these countries, should I get tested?

If you have lived or travelled to areas where the disease is common and have had contact with freshwater (bathing, putting your feet or skin in the water, washing clothes...), it is advisable to get tested, even if you have no symptoms.

5. How do you catch this parasite?

The parasite enters the body through the skin when a person comes into contact with contaminated freshwater. You do not need to drink it: simple contact is enough.

6. Can it be transmitted from person to person?

No. Schistosomiasis is not transmitted from person to person. It is only acquired through contact with contaminated water in areas where the parasite is present.

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7. Is it a common disease?

Yes. In endemic countries, it is estimated to affect 250 million people. In non-endemic countries, such as in Europe, the infection affects migrants and international travellers and is usually an underdiagnosed infection. Estimates suggest that around 35% of the sub-Saharan migrant population may have schistosomiasis. In Spain, around 150,000 people could be affected.

8. Why do many people not know they have it?

Because in many cases it does not produce symptoms at first or the symptoms are non-specific. This means it is underdiagnosed in Spain and Europe.

9. How does it affect women differently?

Schistosomiasis can affect the female genitals, causing:

- Pain during sexual intercourse
- Bleeding
- Vulvovaginal symptoms such as itching and increased discharge
- Fertility problems
- Higher risk of infections and miscarriages

Therefore, a gender-sensitive approach to diagnosis and treatment is essential.

10. How does it affect men differently?

Schistosomiasis can affect the male genitals, causing:

- Pain during intercourse or ejaculation
- Testicular pain
- Infertility
- Erectile dysfunction

11. Can children also have it?

Yes, especially if they have been in areas where the disease is common. In fact, children are frequently infected when playing and being exposed to freshwater in rivers and lakes. Early diagnosis is also important in children to prevent chronic complications.

12. Is there a cure?

Yes. Schistosomiasis can be treated with medication. If detected early, many people improve within a few months and avoid complications.

13. Why is early detection important?

Because early diagnosis:

- Prevents serious complications
- Improves quality of life
- Reduces the impact on organs such as the liver, kidneys or reproductive system

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14. Where can I get tested?

You can go to:

- Health centres
- Hospitals
- Community or social organisations

You can also find out more through specific programmes such as SCHISTO ZERO.

15. Is the treatment accessible?

Yes. In Spain, treatment is available through the healthcare system. Although it is not a medication that can be obtained at a pharmacy, it is available in hospitals.

16. What barriers may exist to accessing diagnosis or treatment?

Some people may encounter:

- Lack of information
- Language barriers
- Fear or distrust
- Administrative difficulties

17. What can I do if I have questions?

You can:

- Ask at your health centre
- Go to associations or social organisations
- Participate in informational workshops

There are consultation and support channels designed to help you.

18. How can I protect my health?

- By learning about the disease
- By getting tested if you have lived in at-risk areas
- By going to your nearest health centre if you have symptoms