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Shigellosis Cases Again Appear in the Guam Community

Handwashing and Better Hygiene Needed for Prevention of All Infectious Diseases

The Department of Public Health and Social Services (DPHSS) is monitoring and investigating cases of Shigellosis in Guam. From January 1 to June 16, 2020, a total of 8 Shigellosis cases have been reported (with 100% confirmed). One household contains epidemiologically linked cases, where more than one member of the family has also gotten ill.

Shigellosis is an infectious disease caused by a group of bacteria called *Shigella* (shih-GEHL-uh). Most who are infected with *Shigella* develop diarrhea, fever, and stomach cramps starting 1 to 2 days after they are exposed to the bacteria, and usually resolve in 5 to 7 days. Although rare, Shigellosis can develop into a serious infection with risk of seizures and even death. Some people who are infected may have no symptoms at all, but may still pass the *Shigella* bacteria to others. *Shigella* spreads easily from one person to another, but can be stopped by frequent and careful handwashing with soap and taking other hygiene measures.

Infants and young children continue to be at high risk. The majority (63%) of the 2020 cases involve infants and young children (less than 5 years) who have been taken to the emergency room for treatment and many have been hospitalized.

The public is asked to be vigilant about hand-washing, hygiene, and sanitation, especially for people living in over-crowded housing situations, in housing where there is a lack of indoor plumbing, or where contact with fecal matter is possible. Prior studies in Guam have shown that *Shigella* infections are more common in economically disadvantaged households with poor sanitary conditions.

The community is the first line of defense to protect those in danger and stop this spread. Community members, regardless of their housing situation, need to make sure they have dedicated facilities for washing with soap and water in the bathroom/restroom, and facilities for cooking and washing dishes in the kitchen area.

All health care providers in Guam are urged to be on alert for possible cases of Shigellosis and to promptly report suspected cases to the Bureau of Communicable Disease Control, at any of the following numbers: phone 735-7136 or FAX 734-1475.

For more information, please call the DPHSS Epidemiology and Laboratory Capacity Program at 777-1706.



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Shigellosis Fact Sheet



Shigellosis is an infectious disease caused by a group of bacteria called Shigella (shih-GEHL-uh). People usually get sick from Shigella bacteria after putting something in their mouth or swallowing something that has come into contact with the stool (poop) of someone else who is sick from Shigella bacteria. The symptoms of shigellosis include diarrhea, stomach pain, fever, and feeling the need to pass stool even when the bowels are empty.

There is no vaccine to prevent shigellosis. However, you can reduce your chance of getting shigellosis by following these guidelines:

1. Carefully wash your hands with soap and water:
 - Before eating or preparing food for others.
 - After changing a diaper or helping to clean another person who went to the bathroom.
2. If you care for a child in diapers who has diarrhea:
 - Promptly throw away soiled diapers in a covered, lined garbage can.
 - Wash your hands and the child's hands carefully with soap and water immediately afterward.
 - Clean up any diaper leaks or spills immediately.
3. Avoid swallowing water from ponds, lakes, or untreated swimming pools.
4. When traveling internationally, follow safe food and water guidelines, and wash hands often with soap and water.
5. Avoid sexual activity with those who have diarrhea or who recovered from shigellosis in the last few weeks.

If you are sick with shigellosis, you can prevent others from getting sick by:

1. Washing hands often, especially before eating and after using the bathroom or changing diapers.
2. NOT preparing food. If you must prepare food, wash your hands carefully.
3. NOT sharing food with anyone if you or your family members are sick.
4. NOT swimming.
5. NOT having sex (vaginal, anal, and oral) for one week after you no longer have diarrhea. Because Shigella germs may be in stool for several weeks, follow safe sexual practices, or ideally avoid having sex for several weeks after you recover.
6. Staying home from school or from healthcare, food service, or childcare jobs while sick or until your healthcare provider says it is safe to return.