

Press Release:

The Jefferson County and Steubenville City Health Departments are investigating a recent rise in the number of Shigellosis cases in Jefferson County. Shigellosis is an infectious disease caused by a group of bacteria called *Shigella*. Most who are infected with *Shigella* develop diarrhea, fever, and stomach cramps starting a day or two after they are exposed to the bacteria. The diarrhea is often bloody. Shigellosis usually resolves in 5-7 days. In some persons, especially young children and the elderly, the diarrhea can be so severe that the patient needs to be hospitalized. Some persons who are infected may have no symptoms at all, but may still pass the *Shigella* bacteria to others.

Shigella are present in the stools of infected persons while they are sick and for a week or two afterwards. Most *Shigella* infections are the result of the bacterium passing from stools or soiled fingers of one person to the mouth of another person. This happens when basic hygiene and hand washing habits are inadequate. It is particularly likely to occur among toddlers who are not fully toilet-trained. Family members and playmates of such children are at high risk of becoming infected.

Shigella infections may be acquired from eating contaminated food. Food may become contaminated by infected food handlers who forget to wash their hands with soap after using the bathroom. *Shigella* infections can also be acquired by drinking or swimming in contaminated water. Water may become contaminated if someone with shigellosis swims in or plays with it. *Shigella* infections can then be acquired by drinking, swimming in or playing with the contaminated water.

Persons with diarrhea should not attend school, a daycare facility, summer camp, sporting events, or go swimming. People who are ill with diarrhea and employed as a food handler, health care worker, daycare worker or similar positions should not go to work.

The health department encourages the public to utilize the following steps to prevent the spread of shigellosis:

- Wash hands with soap carefully and frequently, especially after going to the bathroom, after changing diapers and before preparing foods or beverages.
- Dispose of soiled diapers properly.
- Disinfect diaper changing areas after using them.
- Keep children with diarrhea out of child care settings.
- Supervise hand washing of toddlers and small children after they use the toilet.
- Do not prepare food for others while ill with diarrhea.
- Avoid swallowing water from ponds, lakes, or untreated pools.

If you think you have shigellosis, you should see your healthcare provider for proper diagnosis, testing, and treatment.

For more information, please contact the Steubenville Health Department (740) 283-6000 x1506 or the Jefferson County General Health District (740) 282-8530.

Dear Daycare Director:

The Jefferson County and Steubenville City Health Departments are investigating a recent rise in the number of cases of Shigellosis in Jefferson County. Shigellosis is a diarrheal illness caused by the *Shigella* group of bacteria. Most who are infected with *Shigella* experience symptoms such as diarrhea, fever, stomach cramps, nausea and vomiting. We strongly recommend that any child who develops these gastrointestinal symptoms be examined by a doctor to obtain a stool culture for diagnosis. Children who have been diagnosed with Shigellosis should not be permitted to return to daycare until diarrhea has ceased and two stool cultures are negative for *Shigella*. If any children in your facility are diagnosed with Shigellosis or develop gastrointestinal symptoms, please report the illness to your local health department.

The single most important measure to prevent transmission of Shigellosis in daycare centers is frequent and careful handwashing with soap, especially after going to the bathroom, after changing diapers, and before preparing foods or beverages. Some additional tips for preventing the spread of shigellosis in your facility include the following:

- dispose of soiled diapers properly
- disinfect diaper changing areas after using them
- keep children with diarrhea out of child care settings
- supervise handwashing of toddlers and small children after they use the toilet
- persons with diarrheal illness should not prepare food for others

Please contact your local health department if you need any additional information about Shigellosis, or to report an illness in your facility: Steubenville Health Department (740) 283-6000x1506 or the Jefferson County General Health District (740) 282-8530. Thank you for your cooperation in this matter.

Sincerely,

Shaleeta Smith, MPH, SIT
Steubenville Health Commissioner

Dear Healthcare Provider:

The Jefferson County and Steubenville City Health Departments are alerting the medical community of a widespread increase in shigellosis in Jefferson County. Since February, Jefferson County has reported 19 lab confirmed cases, with the majority of cases under the age of 10. In the previous 3 years, there have been less than 5 cases combined. Local health authorities have yet to determine a common-link among the cases; however, the investigation is on-going.

For patients that present with shigellosis-like symptoms, the health department is recommending stool cultures for accurate diagnosis and to ensure all cases are properly investigated. This increased surveillance is warranted to prevent further spread of this infectious disease.

Symptomatic individuals are being encouraged to contact their healthcare provider. Any questions regarding shigellosis can be directed to the Steubenville Health Department (740) 283-6000 x1506 or the Jefferson County General Health District (740) 282-8530.

Sincerely,

Shaleeta Smith, MPH, SIT
Steubenville Health Commissioner