

Update on the *Shigella* Outbreak in Saginaw and Genesee Counties

October 26, 2016

Dear community members,

Many of you may have heard that Saginaw and Genesee counties are experiencing an increase in diarrheal disease caused by a bacteria called *Shigella*. From March 1, 2016, to October 26, 2016, 177 cases of *Shigella* infection have been reported throughout the two counties. That is more cases than we've seen during the same period in previous years. We believe the outbreak is slowing down. There were fewer new cases in September. We are still analyzing the numbers from October.

Officials from CDC are in town to help investigate the outbreak. CDC is working with state and local officials, partner organizations, and community residents to learn more about how people from Saginaw and Genesee counties may have gotten sick from *Shigella*. As part of this investigation, health officials will be contacting the people who got sick to learn more about their illness and ask about different things that could contribute to the spread of *Shigella* infection. CDC is also working with public health partners to look into *Shigella* infections that occurred in other parts of Michigan to see if they are connected to the outbreak in Saginaw and Genesee counties. We will provide regular updates on the progress of the investigation at community meetings and with the healthcare community.

How Do *Shigella* Infections Happen?

Shigella outbreaks are not unusual. They occur across the United States, with around 25,000 infections reported each year and an average of 300 to 400 infections reported in Michigan each year. This bacteria spreads easily from one person to another. It only takes a very small amount of *Shigella* germs – less than can be seen by the naked eye – to make someone sick. You can get sick if you put something in your mouth or swallow something that has come into contact with the stool, or feces, of someone else who is sick from *Shigella* bacteria. For example, people could get sick by:

- Changing diapers of children who are infected with the germ.
- Touching people who are sick that might have the germ on their hands or bodies.
- Eating food that was prepared by someone who is sick with the germ.

Make Handwashing a Habit

That's why it's so important to make handwashing a habit. Wash your hands with soap and water throughout the day, and especially at certain times, like after using the bathroom, after changing a diaper, and before preparing food. You can use warm or cold water to wash your hands. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. This type of hand sanitizer will kill *Shigella* bacteria but does not kill all types of germs and will not work well if hands are visibly greasy or dirty. Therefore, you should wash your hands with soap and water as soon as possible after using this type of hand sanitizer. Other products like baby wipes do not completely remove germs and are not recommended for cleaning hands.

Talk to Your Doctor

If you or someone in your family has symptoms of *Shigella* infection, such as diarrhea, a stomachache, and sometimes a fever, it's important to visit your doctor and ask about a test for *Shigella*. In most cases, people who are sick with *Shigella* will get better on their own within 5 to 7 days. But some people, like people who are already sick with other diseases, may take longer to get better or may need antibiotics.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the outbreak or the investigation, please contact your local county health department.

Sincerely,



Dr. Michael Beach
Centers for Disease Control and
Prevention



Dr. Eden Wells
Michigan Department of Health
and Human Services



Dr. Gary Johnson
Genesee County
Health Department