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***Shigella* Cases Increase in Okaloosa County**

OKALOOSA COUNTY – The Okaloosa County Health Department (OCHD) is reporting an increase in *Shigella* cases county-wide, with 49 laboratory confirmed and probable cases since the beginning of this year. Since 2000, Okaloosa County has averaged 3 cases of *Shigella* per year (range 0 – 7). The health department has been working diligently to implement prevention and control measures with child care centers, community health care providers, congregate living facilities, and the Department of Children and Families.

Shigella is a group of bacterial that causes shigellosis. Shigellosis is usually a mild, self-resolving diarrheal illness (meaning the body will fight off the infection without treatment). Most people recover completely within 4 to 7 days. After a person is infected, symptoms may develop within 1 to 3 days. The diarrhea is watery and sometimes bloody. Other symptoms include nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, and fever. Some people never develop any symptoms after being infected.

Shigellosis is very contagious and can spread easily from person to person. The infection is acquired by swallowing something contaminated with the feces of an infected person. This most commonly happens when an infected person does not wash his/her hands properly after a bowel movement, and then touches someone else's hands -- or prepares food for others. 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. Some persons who are infected may not have any symptoms, yet may still pass the *Shigella* bacteria to others.

Shigellosis generally has a cyclic pattern characterized by periods with few cases followed by large community outbreaks, frequently associated with child care settings. In the last decade, Florida has experienced large peaks in 2002/2003 and 2006/2007. An increase in reported shigellosis cases in Florida in 2011 and now in 2012 may indicate that we are entering another period of increased activity in Florida. Implementing prevention measures proactively may decrease the transmission of shigellosis in our community.

THE OCHD RECOMMENDS THAT EVERYONE PRACTICE THE FOLLOWING PREVENTION MEASURES FOR SHIGELLOSIS

- People with diarrhea should stay home from school or work for **at least one full calendar day after symptoms stop.**
- People who have diarrhea should not prepare food or drinks for others.
- **Proper hand washing is the most effective way to prevent shigellosis and many other diseases.** Wash hands after bathroom visits, diaper changes, play time, handling of pets or soil, and before and after food preparation and eating.
- Hand washing among children should be frequent and supervised by an adult. This is especially true in child care facilities and homes with children who have not been fully toilet-trained.
- Proper hand washing consists of lathering hands with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds. Be sure to rinse the palms, backs of hands, between fingers, under fingernails, and around wrists. Go to www.cdc.gov/handwashing to learn more about hand hygiene.
- Everyone who changes a child's diaper should be sure diapers are disposed of properly in a closed-lid garbage can. Immediately after changing a diaper, the hands of both the changer and the child should be washed carefully with soap and warm water. This is particularly important when the child has diarrhea.
- Clean and disinfect bathrooms, diaper changing areas, and soiled toys on a routine basis.

THE OCHD RECOMMENDS THAT EVERYONE PRACTICE BASIC FOOD & WATER SAFETY

- **Clean** hands often. Wash kitchen utensils, plates, cutting boards, and counter surfaces during and after food preparation.
- **Cook** meat and eggs thoroughly.
- **Wash** raw fruits and vegetables.
- **Chill** (refrigerate) promptly.
- **Separate**; don't cross contaminate foods.
- **Drink** only from safe water supplies. Boil water, if in doubt.

Diarrheal disease outbreaks -- or clusters of gastrointestinal symptoms -- found in the general community or a community setting (such as a school, child care center, nursing home, or any other institution) are reportable to the health department.

If you are sick with a diarrheal illness and it is not resolving please see your physician. Your physician will alert us if you have shigellosis.

For more information, dial 311 to reach the Okaloosa County Citizen Information Line; when prompted press option 8, and then option 3 for "health-related issues." You can also visit www.HealthyOkaloosa.com for frequently asked questions, fact sheets, and prevention tips.

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