



LOURDES A. LEÓN GUERRERO
GOVERNOR, MAGA'HAÇA'

JOSHUA F. TENORIO
LT. GOVERNOR, SIGUNDO MAGA'LÁHI

GOVERNMENT OF GUAM

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES
DIPATTAMENTON SALUT PUPBLEKO YAN SETBISION SUSIAT



LINDA UNPINGCO DENORCEY, MPH
DIRECTOR

LAURENT SF DUENAS, MPH, BSN, RN
DEPUTY DIRECTOR

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Shigellosis Outbreak in the Community Continues to be a Problem

The Department of Public Health and Social Services (DPHSS) is continuing to monitor an outbreak of Shigellosis on Guam. In 2019, in only four months, Guam has already reached one-half of the total number of cases from all of last year. In 2018, a total of 29 cases of Shigellosis were reported (with 23 cases or 79% confirmed). So far in 2019, a total of 15 cases have been reported (with 53% confirmed). Approximately two-thirds (66.6%) of the 2019 cases involved children who have been taken to the emergency rooms for treatment with some being hospitalized. Five of the 15 cases are children less than five years old; another five cases are among children less than 15 years old and the other five are adults.

The public is asked to be vigilant about hygiene and sanitation, especially for people living in crowded housing situations or housing where there is a lack of indoor plumbing and where contact with fecal matter is possible.

Shigellosis is an infectious disease caused by a group of bacteria called Shigella. Most individuals who are infected with Shigella develop diarrhea, fever, and stomach cramps starting a day or two after they are exposed to the bacteria. Shigellosis usually resolves in five to seven days. Some people who are infected may have no symptoms at all, but may still pass the Shigella bacteria to others. The spread of Shigella can be stopped by frequent and careful handwashing with soap and taking other hygiene measures.

People usually get sick from Shigella bacteria after putting something in their mouth or swallowing something that has come into contact with the stool of someone who is sick from Shigella bacteria. There is no vaccine to prevent shigellosis. However, you can reduce your chance of getting shigellosis by:

1. Carefully washing your hands with soap and water during key times:
 - Before eating or preparing food for others; or
 - After changing a diaper or helping to clean another person who went to the bathroom.
 - 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 after changing the diapers. Clean up any leaks or spills of diaper contents immediately.
2. Avoid swallowing water from ponds, lakes, or untreated swimming pools.
 3. When traveling internationally, follow safe food and water guidelines and wash hands often with soap and water.
 4. Avoid sexual activity with those who have diarrhea or who recently (several weeks) recovered from shigellosis.

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

1. Washing hands often, especially
 - Before preparing food or eating; and
 - After using the bathroom or after changing diapers
2. NOT preparing food if you are sick.
3. NOT sharing food with anyone who is 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 have recovered.
6. Staying home from school or from healthcare, food service, or childcare jobs while sick or until your health care provider says it is safe to return.

All healthcare providers on 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: 735-7154, 735-3601, or 735-7298. For more information, please call the DPHSS Epidemiology and Laboratory Capacity Program at 735-3601.


LINDA UNPINGCO DENORCEY
Director