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City of Milwaukee Health Department Investigates Outbreak of Shigella Antibiotic-Resistant Strain Linked to Clusters in Childcare Facilities

The City of Milwaukee Health Department (MHD) has been investigating a five-fold increase in the number of reported cases of shigellosis within the City of Milwaukee over the past three months. Latest reports show that the MHD has received 210 cases of confirmed shigellosis year-to-date as compared to 39 cases last year at this time. Many of the cases are in young children, and are linked to clusters occurring within childcare settings.

“Given that this type of illness is easily transmitted especially among young children, we do not anticipate this trend to reverse in the near future,” said Commissioner of Health Bevan K. Baker. “Good and thorough hand-washing (at minimum of 30 seconds with soap) and cleaning of surfaces in childcare settings, identification of diarrheal illness and exclusion of sick individuals from daycare settings is absolutely essential for effective disease control in our community.”

Shigellosis is a bacterial infection that can result in symptoms of diarrhea, often with fever and traces of blood or mucous in the stool; abdominal cramps; headache and fever that can last for several weeks.

It is readily spread in group settings such as childcare facilities, schools and within large families. Contaminated food and water sources can also be implicated. Shigellosis is treated through use of antibiotics. However, as seen in other shigella outbreaks across the country, the MHD has identified that approximately 70% of the cases reported to date are resistant to commonly prescribed antibiotics.

Persons experiencing diarrheal illness for longer than 2 days and have had contact with known cases or settings in which shigellosis has been identified should seek care from their primary medical provider. In addition, persons with diarrheal illness should refrain from attending childcare, school, or summer camps, and should not participate in high risk occupations involving food preparation or healthcare until after getting approval from their healthcare provider. Routine and thorough hand washing and cleaning of surfaces in the above settings is important to limiting the spread of disease.

For more information visit the MHD website at www.milwaukee.gov/health