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Social Services | Public Health | Behavioral Health

news release

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Health officials warn about Shigella exposure

Humboldt County Department of Health & Human Services Public and Environmental Health officials are advising community residents who attended a dinner at the Elks Lodge in Eureka on Wednesday, Aug. 28, that they may have been exposed to Shigella. Attendees experiencing gastrointestinal (GI) issues should contact their primary care provider, as well as take steps not to spread the highly contagious infection.

Instances of Shigella infection are on the rise in the county after at least six individuals have tested positive for the illness since August. The first cluster of three cases was identified in late-August. The individuals all appear to have been infected sometime in mid-August and a connection between the individuals could not be confirmed. Based on this information, Public Health sent out a Provider Alert to monitor for potential cases in case there was ongoing spread in the community.

Humboldt County Health Officer Dr. Candy Stockton said within the last 24 hours, staff was notified about three new confirmed cases and five suspected cases associated with the Aug. 28 event. "We are receiving additional reports of people with GI symptoms who were also at that event and are working to follow up with each of these individuals," Stockton said. "While it is possible that there may be other sources involved, it is highly likely that there was community spread at this event. Based on this, we are taking steps to notify anyone who was at the event of the importance of preventing additional spread if they become ill."

Public Health staff conducting contact tracing say the two clusters do not appear to be connected.

"We typically see a lot of stomach bugs and bacteria circulating during this time of year and this is a good reminder that it is important to stay home and not expose other people. If you are experiencing vomiting or diarrhea wait until symptoms have resolved for 24 to 48 hours," Stockton said, adding

that it is especially important for individuals in the health care, daycare and food services industries to follow these precautions.

Shigella germs are found in stool, and infection is spread by eating food or drinking liquids contaminated by an infected person, or when a person touches a contaminated surface or object and then touches their mouth or puts the object into their mouth. People who have contracted shigellosis typically experience a fever, abdominal cramps and diarrhea which may be bloody.

Onset of shigellosis symptoms usually occurs one to two days after exposure—but may take longer—and lasts around a week. Infected people can remain contagious up to six weeks after symptoms resolve.

Most people with shigellosis recover completely without severe complications. In rare cases Shigella may cause bloodstream infections, seizures, kidney failure or arthritis.

The best way to prevent the spread of shigellosis is to wash hands:

- Before, during and after preparing food
- Before eating
- Before and after caring for someone who is sick
- After using the toilet
- After blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing
- After touching garbage
- After changing diapers or cleaning up a child who has used the toilet
- After touching an animal, animal feed or animal waste
- After handling pet food or pet treats.

People with shigellosis should:

- Stay home from school or from health care, food service or childcare jobs while sick
- Abstain from sharing food
- Abstain from swimming and hot tubs
- Abstain from having sex for at least two weeks after symptoms resolve.

If you are experiencing symptoms, contact your primary care provider or call Public Health at 707-268-2182.

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