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PROVIDENCE – The Rhode Island Department of Health (HEALTH) is urging all Rhode Islanders to take a few simple precautions to protect themselves from shigella infection. HEALTH is making this recommendation after nearly 150 people have been reported ill with shigellosis, a diarrheal illness recently linked to *Shigella Sonnei* bacterium.

An initial cluster of 134 cases was reported among individuals who swam at Spring Lake Beach on July 4. An additional 14 cases have been reported in people who swam at Wallum Lake during the past few days, and additional cases have also been reported in Rhode Island residents who swam in nearby Massachusetts.

"It is important for people to know that shigellosis is being reported in northern Rhode Island," said Michael Fine, M.D., director of HEALTH. "Fortunately, good hand washing, avoiding swimming if you've been ill with diarrhea and staying home for 48 hours after you no longer have diarrhea are effective ways to help prevent the spread of shigellosis."

HEALTH began investigating an outbreak of gastrointestinal illness associated with Spring Lake Beach on July 6. The beach, which showed no evidence of fecal coliform bacteria in recent test results, has been re-opened for swimming. HEALTH has since received reports of additional shigellosis cases associated with swimming in lakes in northern Rhode Island and nearby Massachusetts.

Most people infected with *Shigella* develop diarrhea, fever, and stomach cramps starting one to three days after exposure. Most infections are not severe and last between 48 and 72 hours. Mild episodes do not require antimicrobial therapy.

To protect yourself from shigellosis, be sure to wash your hands thoroughly after using the bathroom or changing a diaper, and before eating or preparing food. For the protection of everyone, avoid swimming if you have or have recently (within the last 48 hours) had diarrhea. Also, children who are not yet toilet trained and attend daycare should be kept home if they have diarrhea, and for 48 hours after the diarrhea clears.

If you are ill with diarrhea, wash your hands often, avoid preparing food for others for at least 48 hours after you are free from diarrhea, and stay home from school, work, camp, daycare or other community activities until you have been completely free of diarrhea for 48 hours. If someone in your home is ill with diarrhea, clean frequently with a bleach solution, especially bathrooms and frequently touched surfaces such as doorknobs, light switches, telephones and remote controls. People who develop symptoms of diarrhea, abdominal pain, fever or vomiting should contact their doctor.

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Related links

[About Shigellosis](#)

Department or agency: Department of Health

Online: <http://www.health.ri.gov>

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