



NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE
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Commissioner

2011 Alert: Outbreak of Shigellosis in Borough Park and Williamsburg

Please Distribute to All Clinical Staff in Pediatrics, Primary Care, Internal Medicine, Infectious Diseases, Emergency Medicine, Family Medicine, Laboratory Medicine and Infection Control Staff

- **Fifty cases of shigellosis among the Observant Jewish community in Borough Park and Williamsburg have been diagnosed since August 29, 2011**
- **Most cases are occurring in children under six years old.**
- **Physicians should not routinely prescribe antibiotics to patients with *Shigella* infection.**
 - **Antibiotics should be prescribed only if a patient has severe illness, prolonged illness, or risk factors for systemic illness, such as an immune-compromising condition.**
 - **When treatment is necessary antimicrobial susceptibility results should be used to guide therapy**

November 2, 2011

Dear Colleagues,

Since August 29, 50 cases of shigellosis have been identified among the Observant Jewish community in Borough Park and Williamsburg. Laboratory results reveal that isolates are *Shigella sonnei* (group D). This outbreak primarily affects young children, with 62% of case-patients under six years old. Outbreaks of shigellosis have occurred in this community every 3-5 years, and some outbreaks have involved hundreds of cases. The New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) is working with the community to prevent further cases. We are recommending strict handwashing after using the toilet, after diapering, before eating, and before preparing food, and we are recommending that young children do not attend daycare when they are ill. Children with shigellosis should not return to daycare until their symptoms resolve and two follow up stool specimens obtained at least 24 hours apart are negative. Please emphasize these issues with your patients, especially in the affected communities.

Most *Shigella* infections are mild, resolving on their own and requiring only supportive treatment (e.g., increasing oral fluid intake). Physicians often prescribe antibiotics for shigellosis, because antibiotics have been shown to reduce the duration of illness. In this outbreak, DOHMH recommends that physicians do not routinely prescribe antibiotics to patients with *Shigella* infection. We do not recommend antibiotic treatment, because widespread use of antibiotics during an outbreak may result in the rapid emergence of antibiotic-resistant strains. DOHMH recommends that physicians prescribe antibiotics to treat *Shigella* infection only if a patient has severe illness, prolonged illness, or risk factors for systemic illness, such as an immune-compromising condition. Although all isolates from this outbreak have, to date, been susceptible to ampicillin, co-trimoxazole, and ceftriaxone, physicians should tailor treatment based on susceptibility results, because, as mentioned, antibiotic resistance can emerge rapidly during an outbreak and high levels of resistance have been seen in previous outbreaks in Borough Park and Williamsburg.

To monitor antimicrobial resistance among *Shigella* in NYC, laboratories should forward all *Shigella* isolates to the Public Health Laboratory (PHL) at:

Public Health Laboratory, Rm 136
455 First Ave
New York, NY 10016
(212) 447-6112

Providers are required to report all laboratory-confirmed *Shigella* cases to DOHMH, using the Universal Reporting Form either electronically (eURF) or on paper. Paper URF forms can be found at <http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/hcp/hcp-reporting.shtml> OR report on line at <http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/hcp/hcp-urf.shtml>.

Providers are also required to report all clusters of shigellosis, cases in foodhandlers, and cases who attend daycare immediately by calling DOHMH:

During business hours: Bureau of Communicable Disease at 347-396-2600
After hours: Poison Control Center at (212) 764-7667 or (800) 222-1222

As always, we appreciate your continued assistance in addressing emerging public health issues in New York City.

Sincerely,

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