

NEW MEXICO HEALTH ALERT NETWORK (HAN) ADVISORY

Ongoing *Shigella* Infections in Albuquerque Area Homeless Population

Shigella is contagious and can spread easily from person to person in areas with poor sanitation.

December 16, 2021

The New Mexico Department of Health (DOH) is working to help control a confirmed *Shigella* outbreak that has been ongoing since May 2021. From May through September 2021, 38% of the reported cases were in people experiencing homelessness. Of the 14 cases reported since October 2021, 71% are in the homeless population. **Rapid diagnosis and antimicrobial treatment are important to prevent disease spread.**

Illness is characterized by diarrhea, sometimes with fever, malaise, nausea, vomiting and cramps. Stools typically contain blood and mucus, although mild infections consisting only of watery diarrhea may also occur. Illness is usually self-limited, lasting an average of 4-7 days although severe infections may occur in young children, the elderly, and in persons with poor nutritional status. Outbreaks commonly occur in conditions of crowding or poor sanitation.

Shigella is found in the stool (feces) of infected people and infected people can continue to shed *Shigella* bacilli for up to four weeks after symptoms have resolved. People become infected by direct or indirect fecal-oral transmission from an infected person, via:

- Person to person contact
- Contact with a contaminated object
- Eating food or drinking liquids prepared by infected food handlers
- Sexual contact

Antimicrobial therapy is effective for shortening the duration of diarrhea and eradicating the organism from feces. Treatment should be used in patients with severe symptoms. For patients with mild illness, treatment may be indicated to prevent the spread of the organism. Multidrug resistance is common with *Shigella* so antimicrobial susceptibility testing should be performed. Antimicrobial therapy should be administered for five days. Use of anti-motility or antidiarrheal medications are discouraged in adults.

Good hand hygiene is important to reduce transmission. NMDOH is working with the City of Albuquerque and homeless outreach advocates to increase the number of portable toilets and hand washing stations available to people living in encampments. Local shelters have been advised of the outbreak. If you see a homeless patient in the ED for a *Shigella* infection, please call Albuquerque Healthcare for the Homeless at 505-264-2929 (M-F 8:00-5:00) or email nadiafazel@abqhch.org for follow up once they have been released.

For more information on *Shigella*, please visit the NMDOH *Shigella* webpage or the CDC *Shigella* website.

[\(\[Shigella \\(nmhealth.org\\)\]\(https://www.nmhealth.org/shigella\)\)](https://www.nmhealth.org/shigella)

[\(\[Shigella – Shigellosis | Shigella – Shigellosis | CDC\]\(https://www.cdc.gov/shigella/\)\)](https://www.cdc.gov/shigella/)

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