



Philadelphia Department of Public Health  
**Division of Disease Control**

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**Health Advisory**  
**Increase in Shigellosis Among Men who have Sex with Men (MSM)**  
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Since August 2011, the Philadelphia Department of Public Health Division of Disease Control (DDC) has investigated seven reports of *Shigella flexneri* serovar 2 among adult men; four of these men report having sex with men. Healthcare providers are encouraged to educate patients that shigellosis can be sexually transmitted, obtain stool cultures for patients with diarrhea, and test patients for HIV.

*Shigella* has a very low infectious dose, is highly contagious, and is spread through the fecal-oral route. Symptoms of shigellosis typically begin one to four days after exposure to the bacteria and include diarrhea, fever, abdominal cramps, nausea, or vomiting. In 2011, 58% of confirmed shigellosis reports in Philadelphia were *Shigella flexneri* compared to only 13% in 2010. Pulsed field gel electrophoresis patterns (*genetic fingerprinting*) were nearly identical for the seven *Shigella flexneri* serovar 2 isolates recovered from the Philadelphia adult male cases. Of these seven cases, five are known to be infected with HIV. Among the isolates comprising this most recent cluster, all were resistant to ampicillin.

Stool cultures with antibiotic sensitivity testing should be obtained for persons who present with persistent or severe diarrhea. Antibiotics can help shorten the duration and severity of *Shigella* infection and should be considered for those with severe disease, immune deficiency, or at high risk of transmission to others (child care attendees and workers, food handlers, healthcare workers, and those with high-risk sexual activity).

Healthcare professionals are advised to educate patients that shigellosis can be considered a sexually transmitted infection and that sexual contact, particularly oral-anal and oral-genital contact, can increase the risk for infection. Patients should avoid sex while symptomatic. Sexually active persons should be encouraged to use latex barrier methods, such as dental dams for oral-anal contact and condoms for oral-genital and anal-genital contact, to help prevent transmission. Hands and genitals should be thoroughly washed before and after sex. Additionally, patients and contacts should be reminded to wash hands with soap and water particularly before eating or drinking and after using the bathroom or changing diapers.

State and city public health regulations require the exclusion from work or childcare facilities of persons with *Shigella* infection who are involved in foodservice, healthcare, or childcare. They must have two negative stool cultures collected at least 48 hours after completion of antibiotics and at least 24 hours apart before they can return. Persons with diarrhea due to any infectious cause should be advised to stay home from work, school or childcare until they are completely well.

This recent cluster of shigellosis also highlights the potential for transmission of other sexually transmitted infections. Healthcare providers are encouraged to test for HIV among adults, particularly adult males, who test positive for *Shigella* spp. and in all patients aged 13-64 who have not had an HIV test in the past year.

All confirmed or suspected cases of *Shigella*, HIV, or other sexually transmitted infection should be reported to PDPH by calling 215-685-6740. Additional reporting and disease-specific information can be found at [hip.phila.gov](http://hip.phila.gov) and at [STDPhilly.com](http://STDPhilly.com).

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