



Sedgwick County...
working for you

SEDGWICK COUNTY, KANSAS
COMMUNICATIONS

NEWS

CONTACT: SEDGWICK COUNTY COMMUNICATIONS 316-660-9370 FAX: 316-383-7509

June 30, 2009

Contact: Jenni (Gluszek) McCausland
Kristi Zukovich
316-660-9370

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Clean Hands Make Cents

(Sedgwick County, Kansas) Since this spring, health professionals worldwide have been stressing the importance of hand washing. Many have mocked this advice and even laughed at its simplicity. Unfortunately through the laughter, people are simply not listening. Were Sedgwick County residents doing a better job washing their hands, the Sedgwick County Health Department would not be in the midst of a 6-month shigella outbreak investigation.

Eighty-seven shigella cases have been reported to the state from Sedgwick County since January 1. During 2008, there were twenty cases in Sedgwick County. Shigella is a bacterium that causes severe diarrhea. Besides diarrhea, shigella's symptoms include fever, nausea, vomiting, and cramps. Symptoms normally develop a day or two after exposure and last 5-7 days. While symptomatic, the infected person is contagious and can spread the disease to others. One may recover from a shigella infection without treatment; however, antibiotics may shorten the illness. Shigella is often spread when hand washing habits are inadequate.

This outbreak leaves local health professional pondering how they can get the message about hand washing out in a manner that impacts individuals. What about through the pocketbook?

There is a real cost to NOT washing hands. Consider:

- 78 million people get sick annually from infectious diseases like colds and the flu.
- Hands spread an estimated 80 percent of infectious diseases.
- Better hand washing can reduce the spread of flu, colds, and other highly contagious diseases, including shigella.
- Keeping hands clean prevents illness at home, at school, and at work.

-more-

You can help reduce the number of days employees and students are out sick by spreading the word about hand washing. Encourage employees, family members and friends to do the following.

- Frequently and carefully wash hands with soap and running water for at least 20 seconds.
 - Always wash hands before preparing, serving or eating food.
 - Be sure to wash hands after using the restroom.
 - Always wash hands after changing soiled diapers.
- People who have shigella should not prepare food or pour water for others. If you are a food handler and experience these symptoms, **do not go to work**. You will only spread the illness to coworkers and customers, causing more problems for your employer.
- People with symptoms should also avoid:
 - School
 - Daycare
 - Swimming
- Wash fruits and vegetables before eating.
- Consume water from a safe source.

If you have symptoms, contact your physician to be tested for shigella. To learn more about shigella visit www.sedgwickcounty.org. There you will find a fact sheet with more information about the disease.

For more information, hand washing print materials, or to request a presentation, call the Sedgwick County Health Department at 660-7350 or email btuttle@sedgwick.gov. There are hand washing “how to” fact sheets and downloadable posters available at www.sedgwickcounty.org.

- end -