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Shigella Cases in Ventura County

[Ventura County, CA] -- Ventura County Public Health was notified on Thursday, June 22nd, of an unusually high number of Shigella cases in the county. *Shigellosis* is an infectious disease caused by a group of bacteria called Shigella (shih-GEHL-uh), which most often causes diarrhea and fever. It is highly contagious.

Through a series of interviews with those affected, it has been determined that a number of the cases reported to have eaten at the Souplantation in Camarillo. Of the diners interviewed, there are a total of eight individuals with laboratory evidence of Shigella infection.

Ventura County Public Health's laboratory sent the culture confirmed samples to the State laboratory for typing.

"We're tracking these cases closely," said Public Health Officer Dr. Robert Levin, "and are working closely with Ventura County Environmental Health, which has completed two inspections of the restaurant in the past two days." Dr. Levin credits Souplantation corporate office for making the decision to close the restaurant, starting Thursday through the weekend, to make certain that all steps have been taken to prevent further cases.

The Souplantation Chief Operating Officer has arrived at the Camarillo location and has been joined by a vice-president and the quality assurance manager. All employees are being put through a sanitary training refresher course, the restaurant is being thoroughly cleaned and all food on the premises is being thrown out.

"Souplantation's actions have been exemplary. This is the kind of swift and decisive action, which leads to a collaboration with Public Health that results in a rapid resolution of the problem," added Dr. Levin. It is not currently clear what the source of the infection is. No one food item has been indicated. All employees are being tested and will need to be cleared before returning to work. There are approximately 40 employees at the restaurant.

Most people who are infected with Shigella develop diarrhea, fever, and stomach cramps starting a day or two after they are exposed to the bacteria. Shigellosis usually resolves in 5 to 7 days. Some people who are infected may have no symptoms at all, but may still pass the Shigella bacteria to others. The spread of Shigella can be stopped by frequent and careful hand-washing. Antibiotic treatment is known to decrease the length of illness and to end shedding of the organism within a day or two of starting therapy. People most at risk of serious illness are those with underlying immunosuppressive conditions. Those who may have been exposed who are feeling ill should consult their physician.

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