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November 6, 2008—Immediate Press Release

Shigella Case Reported at Local Elementary School

Thursday, November 6, 2008, a letter from the Columbia County Public Health Department regarding the occurrence of a Shigella case was sent home with all students of Cedar Ridge Elementary School. A copy of the letter is attached for public review. At this time, there is no indication that this case originated at school; however, the school has taken the following preventive measures:

- Parents have received written notification and description of Shigella and its symptoms.
- Sanitization of the entire building is in progress.
- Cleanliness procedures such as hand washing are being emphasized among students and staff.
- School system personnel continue to work with Public Health in addressing the situation.

Questions or concerns regarding this matter should be directed to the Assistant Superintendent of Student Support, Mr. Robert Jarrell. As always, we remain committed to providing all students a safe, positive learning environment.

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Ketty M. Gonzalez, M.D., M.S., District Health Director

Georgia Department of Human Resources ♦ Division of Public Health
Columbia County Health Department ♦ P.O. Box 99 ♦ Appling, GA 30802-0099
706-541-1318 ♦ FAX: 706-541-0753

November 6, 2008

Dear Parent or Guardian:

A child at Cedar Ridge Elementary School has been diagnosed with an intestinal infection caused by the bacteria *Shigella sonnei*. *Shigella* multiplies in the intestines and is passed out of the body in the bowel movement. Symptoms of *Shigella* may include one or more of the following: fever, nausea/vomiting, and/or diarrhea (which may be watery, bloody, or contain mucus). People who are in good health and receive prompt medical attention rarely have serious complications from *Shigella sonnei* infection. In fact, some people can have this infection without actually having diarrhea or feeling sick. Anyone can be infected with *Shigella*, and it can be caught repeatedly. This letter is being written to answer some common questions about *Shigella* and to help you prevent the spread of this illness in your home and community.

How do you catch Shigella?

When people do not wash their hands well after going to the bathroom, changing diapers, or helping a child go to the bathroom, germs stay on their hands. The germs can then spread to food or drink or to objects and, eventually, to other people's hands and mouth. The germs are then swallowed and multiply in the intestines, causing an infection. Young children can easily spread diarrheal disease due to their tendency to explore their environment with their hands and mouth and not wash their hands thoroughly.

How do you know if you have a diarrheal disease caused by Shigella?

Laboratory tests on stool samples are necessary to identify the germ causing diarrhea.

How can you stop the spread of this illness in your household?

1. Be sure everyone in the family washes his/her hands for at least 30 seconds after using the bathroom, helping a baby or child with diapers or toileting, and before preparing or eating food. Remember that all children also need to have their hands washed. Adults should supervise young children. Soap and water should always be used. Remind children to wash the tops of their hands and between the fingers.
2. If a member of your family develops diarrhea, stomach cramps, nausea, and/or vomiting, visit your family physician and take this letter with you. *Children with diarrhea or vomiting should not attend school or day care.* A laboratory test may be necessary to determine what is causing the diarrhea and how to best treat it.
3. Children should wash their hands before leaving for school or day care each morning and immediately upon arriving back from school in the afternoon. The staff of community schools and day care centers should be working with your child throughout the day to be sure their hands are thoroughly washed at the appropriate times.

Please contact your family physician if you have questions. You may also contact Columbia County Health Department at 706-868-3330.

Sincerely,
Phyllis H. Roland
Facility Administrator

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