

[INSERT DATE]

Dear Parent or Guardian:

A student in your child's school was recently diagnosed with shigellosis, an infection of the intestines that causes diarrhea. It is usually a mild illness, and most people recover completely within a few days. This disease is fairly common with an average of 1,300 cases per year reported to the Florida Department of Health since 2005.

The disease is caused by a group of bacteria called *Shigella*. The infection is acquired by swallowing something contaminated with the feces of an infected person. This most commonly happens when an infected person does not wash his/her hands properly after a bowel movement, and then touches somebody else's hands or prepares food for others. Even persons without symptoms can carry the bacteria and pass it on to others. This means that your child may not be sick, but could still have the bacteria and pass it on to other members of your family.

After a person is infected, symptoms may develop within 1 to 3 days. A person with shigellosis may have:

- Diarrhea (may be watery or bloody)
- Fever
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- No symptoms

The illness is usually self-resolving (meaning the body will fight off the infection without treatment), and lasts 4 to 7 days. If you notice any of the above symptoms in your child or other family members, please consult your physician. Since other bacteria and viruses can cause these same symptoms, the only way to diagnose the disease is by testing a sample of feces for the bacteria. If your child is infected, treatment is available that will shorten the illness and reduce the amount of time that a person can transmit the disease.

Proper handwashing is the most effective way to prevent shigellosis and many other diseases. Children should be taught to wash their hands with soap and water before eating or preparing food, and after using the toilet, changing a diaper, playing outside, or petting an animal.

If you have any questions, please contact the **[INSERT COUNTY NAME]** County Health Department Epidemiology Program at **[INSERT PHONE NUMBER]**.

Sincerely,

[INSERT SIGNATURE BLOCK]