

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Media Contacts:

Allison Thrash, Health Information Officer
Santa Clara County Public Health Department
Office: 408-792-5155; Mobile: 669-225-0050
Allison.Thrash@phd.sccgov.org

Gwen Mitchell, Director
Santa Clara County Office of Public Affairs
Office: 408-299-5151
Gwen.Mitchell@ceo.sccgov.org

SHIGELLA OUTBREAK UPDATE: NEWS CONFERENCE AT 1:45 PM TODAY

Santa Clara County, CA: The Santa Clara County Public Health Department has received the final lab results from all of the food handlers who worked at Mariscos San Juan #3 restaurant during the Shigella outbreak on October 16th and 17th. All but one food handler tested negative for Shigella. Based on work schedules and the onset of the food handler's illness, the department believes that the individual who tested positive for Shigella likely contracted the disease as a result of the outbreak and was not the cause of it. Nevertheless that food handler will be restricted from working until it is determined that the individual is Shigella-free.

Of the total number of people sickened by this outbreak, 22 (including the food handler at Mariscos San Juan #3) work in sensitive occupations, such as food service, health care and childcare. As per normal procedures, they have all been restricted from work until it can be verified by the public health department that they are no longer shedding Shigella bacteria. Fortunately, there was very little secondary spread from this outbreak, with only 3 possible cases of secondary infection. Secondary infection means that someone who became sick with Shigella from eating at the restaurant during the outbreak period (October 16th or 17th) later passed the bacteria on to someone else, who then also became sick with Shigella.

The quick action by the Public Health Department (PHD) and the Department of Environmental Health (DEH) in closing the restaurant early in the outbreak, on Sunday, October 18th, kept this outbreak from sickening even more people. Because Shigella is extremely contagious, prevention of secondary spread of the bacteria was an important goal. Secondary spread appears to have been limited thanks to the help of doctors who diagnosed and treated the ill; the widespread media coverage, which helped to educate the public about how to prevent the spread of Shigella; and the Public Health Department's efforts to restrict people in sensitive occupations from returning to work while shedding Shigella.

"The good news is that this outbreak of Shigella appears to have leveled off," said Dr. Sara Cody, Santa Clara County Health Officer. "We continue to emphasize proper hand washing and staying home if you are ill, and we will continue to monitor for secondary spread. Despite not having a 'smoking gun' that caused the outbreak, we do know that the outbreak stemmed from this restaurant, and we have taken the necessary actions to protect the public."

Mariscos San Juan #3 restaurant remains closed; however the owner is working with DEH and PHD to take the necessary steps to reopen the restaurant.

A news conference with Deputy Health Officer Dr. George Han will be held at 1:45 p.m., today, in front of the Public Health Department, 976 Lenzen Avenue, San Jose, CA 95126.

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