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## SHIGELLOSIS IN THE HOMER AREA

In May, a two-year-old child gravely ill with shigellosis, was transferred from Homer to Anchorage for intensive care. Investigation led quickly to reports of other illness in siblings and acquaintances in the child's hometown of Nikolaevsk, also known locally as Russian Village.

The "Old Believer" Russians are a proud and industrious community of people who have survived Mongolian bandits, Red Chinese disfavor, an ocean voyage from Hong Kong to Brazil, resettlement in Oregon, and finally, settlement in rural Alaska. They are a religious people now living in several secluded communities near Homer where they have been able to maintain their Russian language and cultural traditions relatively unmolested by outside influences.

With the invaluable assistance of the Homer Itinerant Public Health Nurse (PHN) who is well known in Nikolaevsk, an investigation was conducted there. We were able to identify a dozen recent cases of illness compatible with shigellosis. Two had been confirmed by culture of the stool. No one was ill on the day of the visit.

An important question was whether the illness might be attributed to a contaminated water supply. But instead of finding cases occurring uniformly throughout the distribution of the town's water, we found clusters of illness in individual households where illness clearly had spread from one person to another and then to another and so on. Thus, we could not incriminate the water.

Control measures included providing each household in Nikolaevsk with a handout in the Russian language describing shigellosis and recommending home hygiene practices likely to help interrupt its spread. During the period of the outbreak, the PHN was able to provide stool culturing and an appropriate antibiotic to anyone with symptomatic shigellosis and to household contacts with positive stool cultures. An additional eight cases were counted for a total of 20 before the illness apparently died out over the next two weeks.

However, in mid-July, another ill two-year-old appeared in Homer from the new Russian settlement of Kachemack Silo. The stool culture grew shigella with antibiotic sensitivities similar to previous Nikolaevsk isolates, suggesting Nikolaevsk as the source. We visited the new settlement and documented recent illness and positive stool cultures in the other three children from the same household. They were given antibiotics. Presumptive shigellosis in the mother had already responded to treatment, making a total of five new cases.

None of the other households in Kachemack Silo reported recent illness. However, literature in Russian again was provided and surveillance was established. We hope these latest cases represent the "last gasp" of this outbreak. Further cases of this reportable disease should be called in to our Rapid Telephonic Reporting System by asking the operator for Zenith 1700. In addition, Charles Ryan, M.D. or John Middaugh, M.D., at 272-7534 will be happy to discuss the particulars of any suspected or confirmed cases of shigellosis.