



NATIONAL PUBLIC
HEALTH ORGANIZATION

Department of Food-borne and Water-borne Diseases

EPIDEMIOLOGICAL DATA FOR SHIGELLOSIS IN GREECE

2004-2020

MANDATORY NOTIFICATION SYSTEM

Key Points

- The notification rate of shigellosis in Greece is low.
- Based on data for the 2004-2020 period:
 - The mean annual number of reported cases was low (64, SD=30).
 - A statistically significant increasing trend of the shigellosis notification rate was observed during this period.
 - The notification rate of the disease had a statistically significant seasonal trend; the mean monthly notification rate increased during summer months, reaching a peak in August.
 - The disease was more frequently reported among children, especially in the age group of 0-4 years.
 - 8% of the cases were travel-related.
 - 52% of the notified cases were Roma.

Shigellosis, also called bacillary dysentery, is a disease caused by the bacteria of the genus *Shigella*. *Shigella* comprises of four species or serogroups: *S. dysenteriae* (Group A), *S. flexneri* (Group B), *S. boydii* (Group C) and *S. sonnei* (Group D) [1].

The incubation period of the disease is usually 1-3 days, and may range from 12 to 96 hours; for *S. dysenteriae* it can be up to one week [1].

The pathogen can cause both sporadic cases and outbreaks [2]. In Greece, shigellosis is a mandatory notifiable disease.

Time trend

The number of reported cases with the respective notification rate per year, for the period 2004-2020, are shown in **Table 1**. The temporal distribution of shigellosis notification rate for the same years is depicted in **Graph 1**. The annual notification rate ranged from 1.7 cases in 2008 to 10.9 cases per 1,000,000 population in 2013. The mean annual notification rate for the period 2004-2020 was 5.8 cases per 1,000,000 population (standard deviation: 2.7) and the mean annual number of reported cases was 63.6 (standard deviation: 29.5).

A statistically significant increasing trend of the shigellosis notification rate was observed during this period ($p < 0.001$).

Age and gender distribution

For the period 2004-2020, the disease had a higher mean annual notification rate in the age group 0-4 years (65 cases per 1,000,000 population), followed by the age group of 5-14 years (16 cases per 1,000,000 population) (**Graph 2**).

During the same period, the mean annual notification rate did not differ between males (6.0 cases/1,000,000 population) and females (5.5 cases/1,000,000 population).

Seasonality

There was a statistically significant seasonal trend of the notification rate of the disease ($p < 0.001$). The mean monthly notification rate for the period 2004-2020, was increased during summer, reaching a peak in August, and remained high during autumn (**Graph 3**).

Geographical distribution

The geographical region of Western Greece had the highest mean annual notification rate (11.7 cases per 1,000,000 population), while the lowest rate was noted in the area of Southern Aegean (0.4 cases per 1,000,000 population). The mean annual notification rate of shigellosis by region for the period 2004-2020 is depicted in **Figure 1**.

Laboratory data

During 2004-2020, *S. flexneri* and *S. sonnei* were the most frequently identified *Shigella* species. Only five cases of *S. dysenteriae* were identified. A high percentage of strains were not further typed at the reference center for *Shigella* (**Table 2**).

Characteristics of cases

For the period 2004-2020, 535 (52%) of the notified cases were Roma. One hundred and eighty-seven of the 945 notified cases (17%), for which the respective information was available, reported the presence of another person with similar symptoms among their contacts, whereas 69 (8%) cases had recently travelled abroad (during the incubation period). Two outbreaks among refugees/migrants were reported; one in 2015 in Attica [3] and one in 2019 in the Reception and Identification Center of Samos island.

Discussion

The notification rate of shigellosis in Greece is low (5.8 cases per 1,000,000 population for the year 2020). However, there was an increasing trend of the notification rate of the disease. The high incidence among Roma and refugees/migrants indicates the need for public health measures targeting at these specific populations. The mean notification rate of shigellosis in the EU and the EEA/EFTA countries was 22.8 cases per 1,000,000 population for the year 2019 [4]. When interpreting these data, the surveillance systems' probable under-reporting should be considered. The seasonal and age distribution agrees with that reported by other European countries [4].

The low notification rate of shigellosis in Greece, in 2020, may be explained by the COVID-19 pandemic during which the laboratory testing for the diagnosis of the disease may have decreased and at the same time the under-reporting in the surveillance systems may have increased.

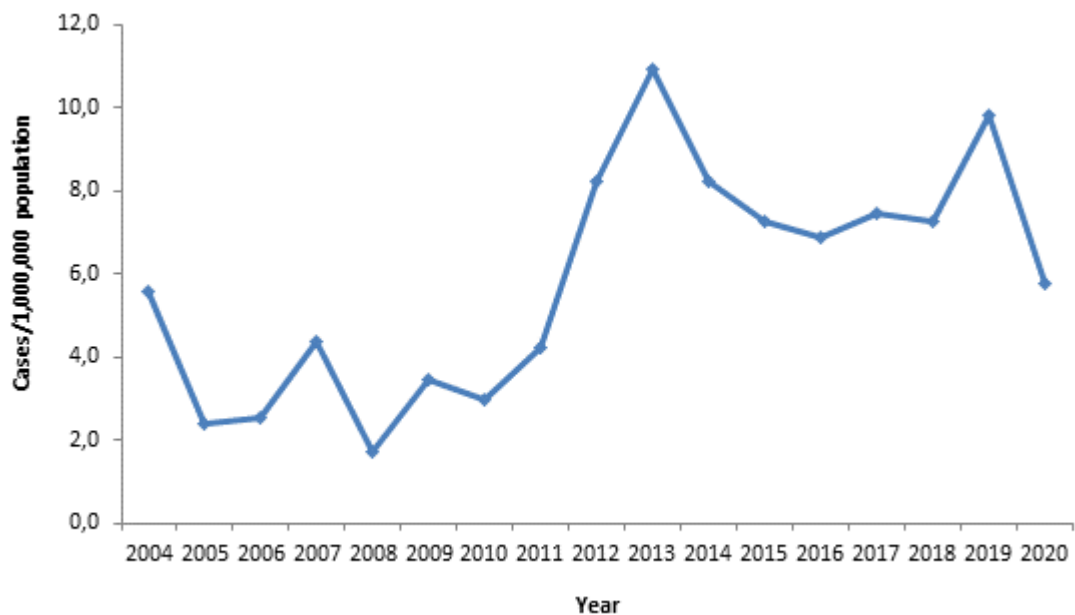
References

1. Heymann D, MD. Control of Communicable Diseases Manual. 20th Edition, 2015, American Public Health Association.
2. EFSA and ECDC (European Food Safety Authority and European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control), 2021. The European Union One Health 2019 Zoonoses Report. EFSA Journal 2021;19(2):6406, 286 pp. <https://doi.org/10.2903/j.efsa.2021.6406>
3. Georgakopoulou T, Mandilara G, Mellou K et al. Resistant *Shigella* strains in refugees, August-October 2015, Greece. Epidemiol Infect. 2016, 16:1-5.
4. European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control. Surveillance Atlas of Infectious Diseases. Shigellosis – Data by Country and Year. Current time period: 2019. Available from: <https://atlas.ecdc.europa.eu/public/index.aspx>

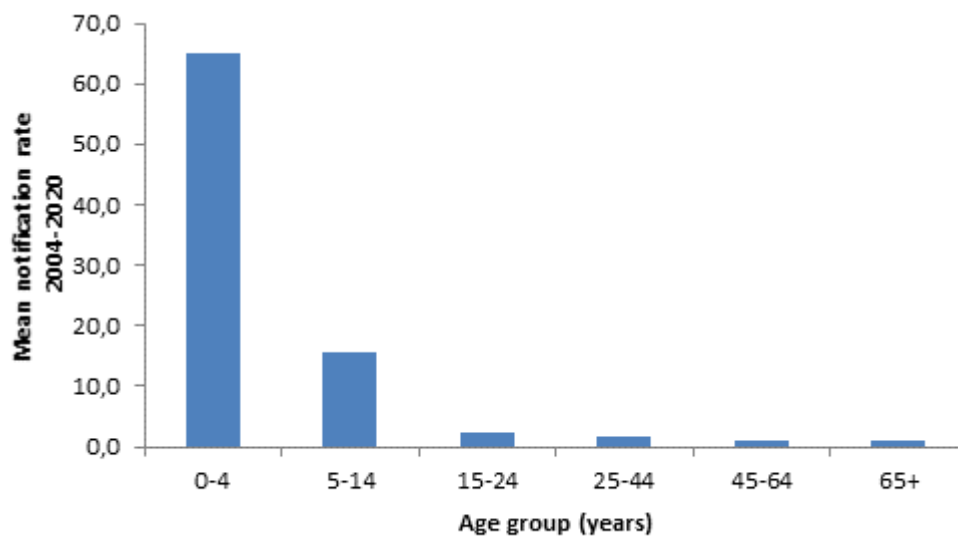
Table 1. Annual number of notified cases and notification rate of shigellosis, Mandatory Notification System, Greece, 2004-2020.

Year	Number of cases	Annual notification rate (per 1,000,000 population)
2004	61	5.6
2005	26	2.4
2006	28	2.5
2007	48	4.3
2008	19	1.7
2009	38	3.4
2010	33	3.0
2011	47	4.2
2012	91	8.2
2013	120	10.9
2014	90	8.2
2015	79	7.3
2016	74	6.9
2017	80	7.4
2018	78	7.2
2019	105	9.8
2020	62	5.8
Total	1,079	5.8*

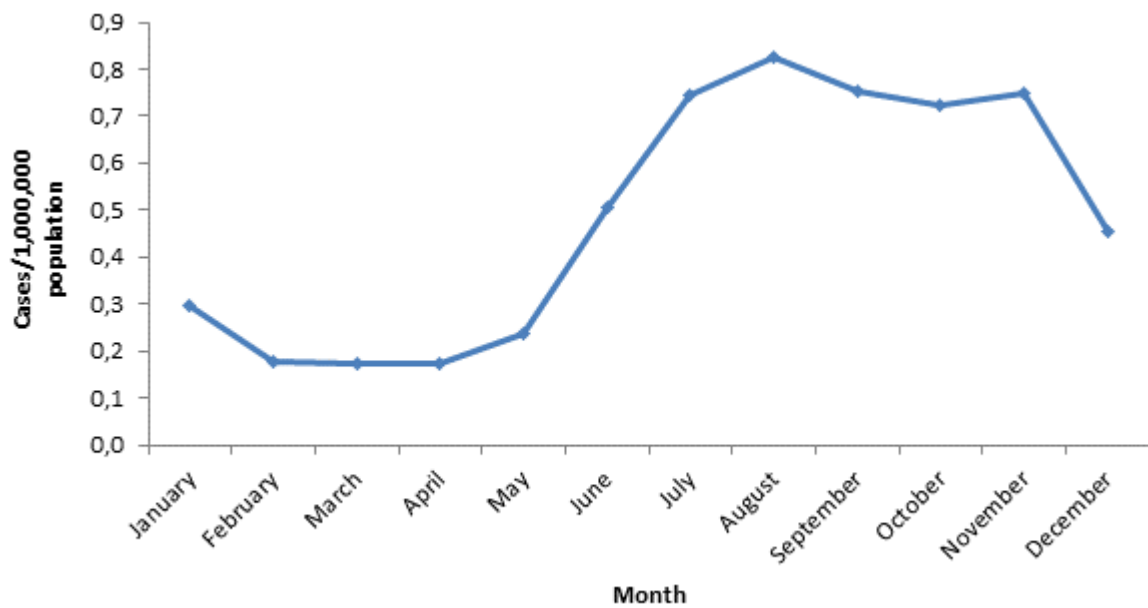
*Mean annual notification rate for the period 2004-2020



Graph 1. Shigellosis notification rate (cases/1,000,000 population) by year, Mandatory Notification System, Greece, 2004-2020.



Graph 2. Mean annual notification rate (cases/1,000,000 population) of shigellosis by age group, Mandatory Notification System, Greece, 2004-2020.



Graph 3. Mean monthly notification rate (cases/1,000,000 population) of shigellosis, Mandatory Notification System, Greece, 2004-2020.

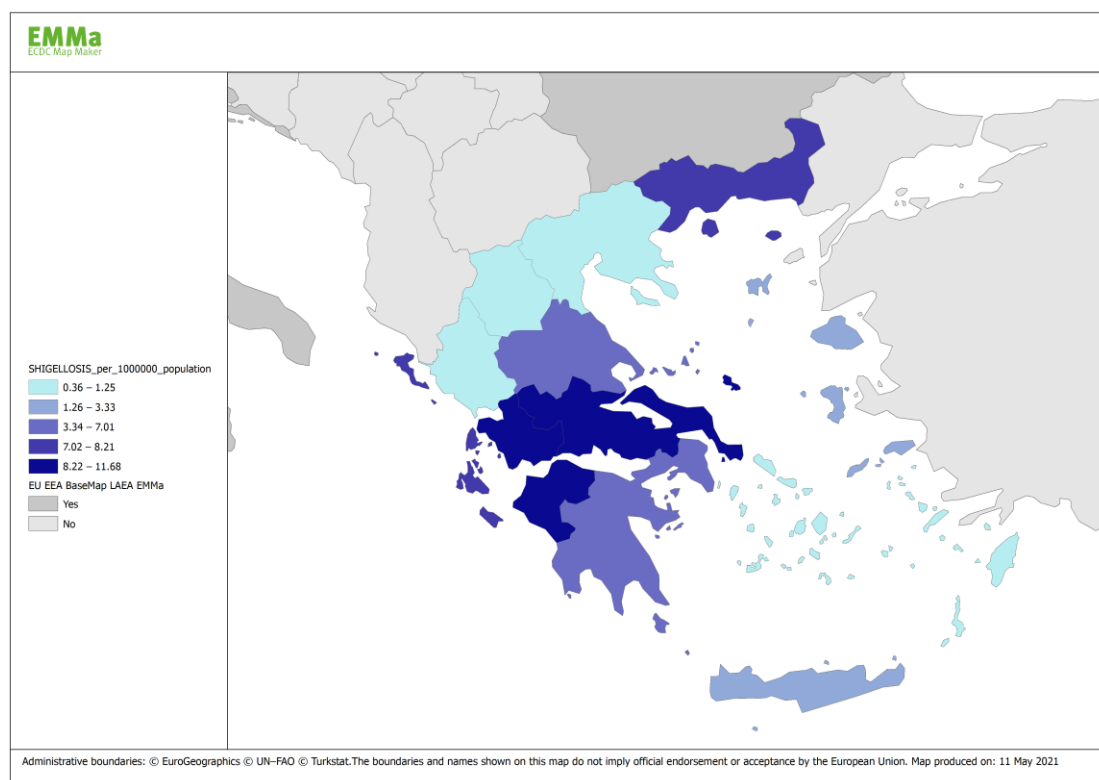


Figure 1. Mean annual notification rate (cases/1,000,000 population) of shigellosis by region, Mandatory Notification System, Greece, 2004-2020.

Table 2. Frequency distribution of *Shigella* species, Mandatory Notification System, Greece, 2004-2020.

	<i>S. flexneri</i>	<i>S. sonnei</i>	<i>S. boydii</i>	<i>S. dysenteriae</i>	Unknown	Total
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)
2004	19 (31)	13 (21)	1 (2)	0 (0)	28 (46)	61 (100)
2005	8 (30)	11 (42)	1 (4)	0 (0)	6 (24)	26 (100)
2006	4 (15)	2 (7)	1 (4)	0 (0)	20 (74)	27 (100)
2007	4 (8)	23 (49)	0 (0)	0 (0)	20 (43)	47 (100)
2008	7 (50)	1 (7)	0 (0)	0 (0)	6 (43)	14 (100)
2009	17 (50)	1 (3)	1 (3)	0 (0)	15 (44)	34 (100)
2010	17 (63)	2 (8)	0 (0)	2 (7)	6 (22)	27 (100)
2011	16 (37)	1 (2)	1 (2)	0 (0)	26 (59)	44 (100)
2012	27 (30)	1 (1)	0 (0)	0 (0)	63 (69)	91 (100)
2013	54 (49)	27 (25)	0 (0)	1 (1)	28 (25)	110 (100)
2014	37 (43)	19 (22)	1 (1)	0 (0)	30 (34)	87 (100)
2015	45 (61)	18 (24)	4 (5)	2 (3)	5 (7)	74 (100)
2016	29 (41)	12 (17)	4 (6)	0 (0)	25 (36)	70 (100)
2017	25 (33)	31 (41)	1 (1)	0 (0)	18 (24)	75 (100)
2018	25 (39)	21 (32)	2 (3)	0 (0)	17 (26)	65 (100)
2019	28 (27)	31 (30)	2 (2)	0 (0)	44 (42)	105 (100)

	S. flexneri n (%)	S. sonnei n (%)	S. boydii n (%)	S. dysenteriae n (%)	Unknown n (%)	Total n (%)
2020	14 (23)	11 (18)	11 (18)	0 (0)	26 (42)	62 (100)

Last updated: May 2021