

This is an official
DHEC Health Advisory

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Non-tuberculous *Mycobacterium* Infections among Surgical Patients

Summary

The South Carolina Department of Health And Environmental Control (DHEC) has been investigating a cluster of non-tuberculous *Mycobacterium* (NTM) infections among surgical patients in the Lowcountry Region. This Health Advisory is being sent to raise awareness among health care providers and health care facilities regarding the possibility of NTM infections following surgical procedures and to provide recommendations for diagnosis and reporting.

NTM are slow-growing bacteria that can be found in surface water, tap water, and soil. NTM have previously been reported to cause infections following cosmetic procedures, such as tattoos, and surgical procedures. In addition, in 2016, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released information regarding NTM infections associated with contaminated heater-cooler devices used during cardiac surgery.

The cluster of NTM infections that DHEC has been investigating primarily involves patients who developed surgical site infections following breast reconstructive or plastic surgery. To date, the investigation has not identified a specific source or route of transmission that has led to the development of NTM infections in these patients and multiple species of NTM have been identified among those infections. As part of this investigation, patients identified to be at potential risk of such an infection are being directly contacted to discuss this risk.

DHEC is providing information about this cluster to raise awareness of the possibility of NTM as a cause of infections in surgical patients and to encourage clinicians to report clusters of such infections.

Recommendations for Health Care Providers and Facilities

- Be aware that NTM can cause infections in patients following surgical and cosmetic procedures.
- Diagnosis of NTM infections can be difficult, particularly given the extended incubation periods that have been reported with these infections.
 - Be aware that patients with NTM infections may not experience symptoms for an extended period of time following exposure. In the current cluster, the median time from surgery to onset of symptoms was 2 months (range=0.6 to 10.6 months). In other

situations, such as the infections associated with the heater-cooler devices, the time from surgery to onset of symptoms was over a year for some patients.

- Patients who present with symptoms of a surgical site infection should be evaluated for the cause of the infection. Ensure that appropriate laboratory tests are ordered that will detect NTM.
 - Obtain acid fast bacteria (AFB) cultures from infected wounds and/or blood to increase the likelihood of NTM identification.
 - Obtaining an AFB smear can also help provide preliminary information while awaiting culture results.
- Report clusters of NTM infections to DHEC, particularly if the patients have the same types of surgical or medical procedures in common.
- Report NTM infections to DHEC in patients who have undergone breast reconstructive or plastic surgery in the past year.
- Because NTM can be found in tap water, health care providers and facilities are encouraged to evaluate their procedures to ensure that contamination of medical equipment or the surgical field with tap water is not occurring during the pre-operative, operative, or immediate post-operative periods.

DHEC contact information for reportable diseases and reporting requirements

Reporting of NTM clusters is consistent with South Carolina Law requiring the reporting of diseases and conditions to your state or local public health department. (State Law # 44-29-10 and Regulation # 61-20) as per the DHEC 2017 List of Reportable Conditions available at: <http://www.scdhec.gov/Library/CR-009025.pdf>

Federal HIPAA legislation allows disclosure of protected health information, without consent of the individual, to public health authorities to collect and receive such information for the purpose of preventing or controlling disease. (HIPAA 45 CFR §164.512).

Regional Public Health Offices – 2017

Mail or call reports to the Epidemiology Office in each Public Health Region

MAIL TO:

<p style="text-align: center;">Lowcountry</p> <p>4050 Bridge View Drive, Suite 600 N. Charleston, SC 29405 Fax: (843) 953-0051</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Midlands</p> <p>2000 Hampton Street Columbia, SC 29204 Fax: (803) 576-2993</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Pee Dee</p> <p>145 E. Cheves Street Florence, SC 29506 Fax: (843) 661-4859</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Upstate</p> <p>200 University Ridge Greenville, SC 29602 Fax: (864) 282-4373</p>
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CALL TO:

<p style="text-align: center;">Lowcountry</p> <p>Berkeley, Charleston, Dorchester Phone: (843) 953-0043 Nights/Weekends: (843) 441-1091</p> <p>Beaufort, Colleton, Hampton, Jasper Phone: (843) 322-2453 Nights/Weekends: (843) 441-1091</p> <p>Allendale, Bamberg, Calhoun, Orangeburg Phone: (803) 268-5833 Nights/Weekends: (843) 441-1091</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Midlands</p> <p>Kershaw, Lexington, Newberry, Richland Phone: (803) 576-2749 Nights/Weekends: (888) 801-1046</p> <p>Chester, Fairfield, Lancaster, York Phone: (803) 286-9948 Nights/Weekends: (888) 801-1046</p> <p>Aiken, Barnwell, Edgefield, Saluda Phone: (803) 642-1618 Nights/Weekends: (888) 801-1046</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Pee Dee</p> <p>Chesterfield, Darlington, Dillon, Florence, Marlboro, Marion Phone: (843) 661-4830 Nights/Weekends: (843) 915-8845</p> <p>Clarendon, Lee, Sumter Phone: (803) 773-5511 Nights/Weekends: (843) 915-8845</p> <p>Georgetown, Horry, Williamsburg Phone: (843) 915-8804 Nights/Weekends: (843) 915-8845</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Upstate</p> <p>Anderson, Oconee Phone: (864) 260-5581 Nights/Weekends: (866) 298-4442</p> <p>Abbeville, Greenwood, McCormick Phone: (864) 260-5581 Nights/Weekends: (866) 298-4442</p> <p>Cherokee, Greenville, Laurens, Pickens, Spartanburg, Union Phone: (864) 372-3133 Nights/Weekends: (866) 298-4442</p>
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For information on reportable conditions, see
[http://www.scdhec.gov/Health/FHPF/ReportDiseasesAdverse
Events/ReportableConditionsInSC/](http://www.scdhec.gov/Health/FHPF/ReportDiseasesAdverseEvents/ReportableConditionsInSC/)

DHEC Bureau of Disease Control
Division of Acute Disease Epidemiology
2100 Bull St • Columbia, SC 29201
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Nights / Weekends: 1-888-847-0902

Categories of Health Alert messages:

Health Alert	Conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention.
Health Advisory	Provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.
Health Update	Provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; unlikely to require immediate action.
Info Service	Provides general information that is not necessarily considered to be of an emergent nature.