

Cardiac Services

Advice to patients at hospital discharge about *Mycobacterium chimaera* infection

Dear Sir/Madam

Public Health England (PHE), the Medicines and Healthcare Regulatory Authority (MHRA) and NHS England have carried out an investigation suggesting that a device used to heat and cool the blood during some types of heart surgery has been linked to a rare bacterial infection caused by ***Mycobacterium chimaera***. This device is essential for carrying out surgery and we are now working on reducing the risk. This is an issue that has affected this type of machine across the world.

The risk from this infection is very low - about one person in every 5,000 people undergoing heart valve repair/replacement or aortic repairs will develop it. For patients undergoing coronary artery bypass grafting this risk is less than one in 100,000 (PHE 2017). For patients who do become infected, this infection can be slow to develop and difficult to diagnose. It is possible to develop symptoms years after surgery which is why we are letting people know what symptoms to look for.

Symptoms of an infection with this bacterium have many of the same features of other illnesses. Therefore, if you experience any of the following, you should be seen by your GP or other health care professional who can then consider this diagnosis. Symptoms to be aware of include:

- Unexplained fevers
- Unexplained weight loss
- Increasing shortness of breath
- Waking up with bed sheets showing signs of sweating (night sweats)
- Joint or muscular pain
- Nausea, vomiting or abdominal pain
- Abnormal levels of tiredness / fatigue
- Pain, redness, heat and / or pus around the surgical site

Please note this infection cannot be spread person-to-person and remember that there



Patient Information

are other causes for these symptoms so there is no need to be alarmed or to seek emergency treatment.

What do you need to do?

Be aware of the symptoms, particularly because the infection can develop up to five years after surgery. You will be given a copy of this information letter to give to your GP once you have gone home. When you next visit your GP, we recommend you take this letter with you and ask your GP to check that the information has been added to your patient record.

Further information is available at NHS Choices at www.nhs.uk/Conditions/mycobacterium-chimaera-infection/Pages/Introduction.aspx

If you feel unwell and have one or more of the symptoms listed above, please contact your GP immediately for advice. Your GP can then refer you to an appropriate specialist doctor at the hospital, if necessary, for further review.

If you are diagnosed with the infection, treatments are available.

In the event that any further heart surgery may be recommended in the future, it is important to stress that the risks of infection from this bacteria are very low and much lower than the risks involved in not having appropriate treatment.

Further information may be obtained from NHS 111 or from NHS Choices website & video explanation at: www.nhs.uk/Conditions/mycobacterium-chimaera-infection/Pages/Introduction.aspx

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format please contact 024 7696 5803 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

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Document History

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