

July 23, 2015

Attention: Physicians, Nurse Practitioners, Walk-in Clinics, Hospitals – Emergency,  
Dermatologists

## **RE: HEALTH UNIT CONTINUES INVESTIGATION OF MYCOBACTERIUM INFECTIONS**

The Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health Unit is continuing its investigation into an unusual skin infection after preliminary laboratory results indicate the infections are being caused by *Mycobacterium marinum* (*M marinum*).

The HKPR District Health Unit has investigated five of six cases of the infection with people from the Campbellford area, and all seem to be associated with handling shrimp grown at a local shrimp farm. The Health Unit is working with the shrimp farmer and local grocery store that sells the shrimp to provide information to customers to ensure they wear waterproof gloves when handling the raw shrimp and wash their hands thoroughly with soap and water. In addition, the Health Unit is working with a neighbouring Health Unit as part of case finding.

### **What providers should do?**

- **Report all suspect or confirmed cases to the local Health Unit.**
- **Refer suspect patients to a Dermatologist or other appropriate specialist physician for skin biopsy of the lesion(s) for laboratory confirmation.**
- **Consult with an Infectious Disease specialist before commencing treatment and commence treatment after the lesions have been biopsied.**

### **Laboratory testing**

- Submit biopsy specimens through the nearest Public Health Ontario Laboratory (PHOL) for processing and testing at the PHOL-Toronto. Indicate “Mycobacterial culture” and for diagnostic information please also indicate “Query *Mycobacterium marinum*”.

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Haliburton  
705-457-1391

Lindsay  
705-324-3569

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905-885-9100

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- Collect a minimum 4 mm punch biopsy of a representative skin lesion (at least 2 -3 biopsies if possible).
- Collect aseptically, do not wrap in gauze, select caseous portion if available and do not freeze; if delay in transportation is anticipated, store at 2 – 8°C but transportation to the laboratory should be done as soon as possible.
- Place in a sterile container, and a small amount of sterile saline may be added.
- Specimens should also be submitted for histopathology through your local laboratory provider (this service is not performed by the Public Health Ontario Laboratories).
- Specimens should also be submitted for bacterial culture and susceptibilities through your local laboratory provider (this service is not performed by the Public Health Ontario Laboratories).

**Note: Please do not submit swabs of purulent material for mycobacterial cultures. Swabs are not recommended for mycobacterial culture.**

### Treatment

In patients with clinically compatible illnesses, providers should treat empirically for *M marinum* and not wait for laboratory confirmation. **Consult with an Infectious Disease specialist before commencing treatment and commence treatment after the lesions have been biopsied**

A standard treatment of choice has not been recognized for *M marinum* skin and soft tissue infections. However, antimicrobial therapy is the mainstay of treatment. The duration of therapy is not well defined, but treatment of skin and soft tissue infections should be continued for 1-2 months after resolution of symptoms and lesions. Therefore, the treatment duration is typically 3-4 months, longer if deeper structures are involved.

**If you have questions and/or are reporting suspect or confirmed cases, please call the Health Unit and ask to speak with a nurse in the Communicable Disease Control Department.**

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