

February 25, 2019

To: All Health Care Practitioners

Subject: Possible exposure to both antibiotic-resistant bacteria and blood borne infections among travellers

Dear Colleague:

The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) was contacted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on February 6, 2019 to advise that Canadians may have been exposed to health-care acquired infections. The CDC is investigating an outbreak of VIM-Pseudomonas aeruginosa (carbapenem resistant) infections presenting in the US but originating from hospitals in Tijuana, Mexico, where patients were mostly undergoing an invasive medical procedure such as bariatric surgery. The outbreak investigation conducted by Mexican public health authorities determined that there were deficiencies in reprocessing reusable equipment at the Grand View Hospital, potentially exposing patients to blood-borne infections (BBI) (e.g. HIV, HBV, HCV). Potential exposures occurred on or after August 1, 2018. The identities are not known at this time. PHAC is liaising with the Government of Mexico to seek further information to support Canada's public health action.

Background:

The pathogen implicated in this cluster of infections is carbapenem-resistant Pseudomonas aeruginosa (CRPA). Resistance is due to the Verona integron-encoded metallo-beta-lactamase (VIM).

Risk factors:

- This cluster of CRPA infections has been reported among people who had invasive medical procedures in Tijuana, Mexico.
- Most, but not all, had weight-loss surgery.
- Over half of those infected had surgery at Grand View Hospital, Tijuana. The remainder were people who became infected after surgery at other hospitals and clinics in Tijuana.
- Patients at the Grand View Hospital may have been exposed to BBI.



Recommendations:

Health care providers should be alerted to the possibility that patients returning to Canada following hospitalization in Tijuana, Mexico on or after August 1, 2018, may be colonized or infected with a multidrug-resistant *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* (PA). In patients presenting with infections, VIM-CRPA should be considered as a potential etiology and managed appropriately. Health care facilities should consider screening all patients who were treated in Tijuana for asymptomatic carriage of drug-resistant bacteria. Patients should be placed in single rooms and routine and contact precautions used until microbiological testing information is available.

As patients admitted to the Grand View hospital, specifically, may have also been exposed to blood-borne pathogens (HIV, HBV, HCV), patients should be counseled and offered testing for these agents. Appropriate guidance with respect to minimizing transmission of these agents by practicing safe sex and avoiding sharing items with a risk of blood-blood contact, should be provided until the results of testing are known.

PHAC has posted a public health notice <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/public-health-notices/2019/canadians-receiving-considering-medical-procedures-mexico.html> and shared information with the Canadian Public Health Laboratory Network.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jennifer Russell".

Dr. Jennifer Russell BA, BSc, MD, CCFP
Chief Medical Officer of Health