

FACTSHEET

Mycobacterium Chimaera for open heart surgery patients

Why am I being contacted about this issue?

A type of bacteria known as Mycobacterium chimaera (M. chimaera), has been found in the heater-cooler part of cardiac bypass machines worldwide. The machines are thought to have been contaminated during manufacturing overseas.

It's not possible for the bacteria to enter the blood stream during surgery but there is a very slim chance that it could be transmitted through the air and find its way into a patient.

As the parent or carer of a child who has had heart surgery at The Children's Hospital at Westmead or Sydney Children's Hospital, Randwick, it is important that you are aware that there is a very small risk of your child being infected with this bacteria.

What is Mycobacterium chimaera?

Mycobacterium chimaera (or M. chimaera) is usually found in water or soil. It only very rarely infects humans and then tends to develop very slowly in people who are more susceptible to infection because of other health problems. This infection is not contagious from person to person.

What are the chances of my child being infected?

The chance of your child being infected is very slim – around one in 10,000.

Hundreds of thousands of people worldwide have had cardiac surgery using this machine and only around 50 cases have been identified internationally.

There is always risk with any surgery, including infection risk. While you should be aware of this issue it is not an additional high risk to be concerned about.

The benefit of your child having had this important surgery FAR outweighs any risk.

What symptoms do I look out for in my child?

In the very unlikely case that your child is infected with this bacteria, they may experience:

- Unexplained fevers
- Unexplained weight loss
- Increasing shortness of breath
- Night sweats
- Joint or muscle pain
- Nausea, vomiting or tummy pain
- Extreme fatigue
- Pain, redness or pus around surgical site

These symptoms are NOT specific to M. chimaera and are found in many illnesses. If your child does develop any of these symptoms and they persist, please visit your local doctor and explain that they have had open heart surgery. In the unlikely event that they are affected, effective treatment is available.

The infection can take up to five years after surgery to appear, so please be mindful of these symptoms over time. Infections to date have mainly been in adult patients.

There is no test available to diagnose the infection in a person before they develop symptoms.

Are the contaminated machines being cleaned or fixed?

The contaminated machines have been replaced.

Who do I call for further information?

If you have concerns about this information or your child's exposure to this bacteria, you are welcome to call the children's hospitals' Clinical Governance Unit on (02) 9845 3442.