



Important Information for Medical Professionals Regarding Nontuberculous Mycobacterial (NTM) Infections in Patients with Previous Open Chest Bypass Cardiac Surgery

This page is intended to provide medical professionals in our region with additional information and resources regarding the rare non-tuberculous mycobacterium (NTM) infection that federal agencies believe may be connected to a specific heater-cooler device used throughout the country. For general information about these bacterial exposures and infections related to open-heart surgery devices, please return to the home page : <https://www.pennmedicine.org/ppmc-cardiac-bypass>.

If you have a clinical question pertaining to one of your patients, or if you have a symptomatic patient who requires additional evaluation for potential NTM infection related to cardiac surgery, please call our toll-free line 1-800-890-6963 between 7:30 AM and 8 PM Monday-Friday, and ask to leave a message to speak with an Infectious Diseases (ID) physician. A member of our ID faculty will return your call within 1 business day.

About the Bacteria

NTM are slow-growing organisms commonly found in soil and water, including tap water sources. These organisms are typically not harmful, and considered opportunistic pathogens. Occasionally, NTM can cause pulmonary disease in humans with intact immune systems, and uncommonly cause disseminated infections in very debilitated or immunocompromised persons. The NTM species that has been identified in these infection clusters is *Mycobacterium chimaera*, which is part of the *Mycobacterium avium* complex (MAC). It is treated with the same multi-drug regimen of antibiotics that would usually be prescribed for any other MAC infection.

About the Heater Cooler Device

Heater cooler devices are used to cool or warm the patient's blood during the procedure, but have no direct contact with either the patient or their blood. The specific unit in question has a chamber for water, and it is believed that the NTM in the water are aerosolized into the air while the heater cooler device is running, and the NTM can then come in to contact with the open surgical site. Federal health authorities are concerned that this issue may be widespread and have issued health advisories to hospitals around the country in an effort to alert them of this problem.

Time Frame during Which Penn Presbyterian Medical Center Used the Specific Heater-Cooler Device Implicated in NTM Infection

Between October 1, 2013 and December 17, 2015, our hospital used the specific heater-cooler device that has been associated with NTM infections. We have notified patients who underwent open chest cardiac surgery on bypass during that time period by letter. Patients who had cardiac surgery outside this time period are not considered to be at risk.

Penn Medicine Response to This Issue

We have identified all patients who had open chest cardiac surgery during the time period of potential risk. We have invited these patients to call our toll free hotline with any questions or concerns and to answer 3 screening questions. Patients who screen positive will be offered an in-office visit with one of our providers at no cost. Based upon the findings at the in-office visit, our team will determine whether testing is necessary, or additional follow-up is recommended.



Our current response has been developed after a careful review of the available published medical literature, our communication with other hospitals and health systems that have experienced NTM infections in this patient population, and consensus opinion of our Infectious Diseases physicians and the local and state health authorities.

There are no current published guidelines on screening patients potentially exposed to NTM but who are asymptomatic.

If you wish to review the patient notification letter, the full text appears on our website under “Information for Patients”.

Recommendations for Health Care Providers

If you have a clinical question pertaining to one of your patients, or if you have a symptomatic patient who requires additional evaluation for potential NTM infection related to cardiac surgery, please call our toll-free line 1-800-890-6963 between 7:30 AM and 8 PM Monday –Friday, and ask to leave a message to speak with an Infectious Diseases (ID) physician. A member of our ID faculty will return your call within 1 business day.