

Health Advisory: Deep Skin Wound Fungal Infection in People Injured From Tornado

June 10, 2011

This document will be updated as new information becomes available. The current version can always be viewed at <http://www.health.mo.gov>

The Missouri Department of Health & Senior Services (DHSS) is now using 4 types of documents to provide important information to medical and public health professionals, and to other interested persons:

Health Alerts convey information of the highest level of importance which warrants immediate action or attention from Missouri health providers, emergency responders, public health agencies, and/or the public.

Health Advisories provide important information for a specific incident or situation, including that impacting neighboring states; may not require immediate action.

Health Guidances contain comprehensive information pertaining to a particular disease or condition, and include recommendations, guidelines, etc. endorsed by DHSS.

Health Updates provide new or updated information on an incident or situation; can also provide information to update a previously sent Health Alert, Health Advisory, or Health Guidance; unlikely to require immediate action.

Health Advisory
June 10, 2011

**FROM: MARGARET T. DONNELLY
DIRECTOR**

SUBJECT: Deep Skin Wound Fungal Infection in People Injured By Tornado

Deep skin wound fungal infection can be caused by various fungi, including *Rhizomucor spp.* and other fungi. These fungi are commonly found in the environment, particularly in soil and decaying wood. The disease occurs more often in individuals with uncontrolled diabetes and immune disorders who have sustained wounds from traumatic injuries. However, these infections may also occur in healthy individuals with traumatic injuries. In patients with such injuries, the fungi may cause infection in the injured area. Infected wounds usually do not heal and are painful. Patients might experience fever. Severe illness may develop in infected patients. Cases of deep skin wound fungal infection have been previously reported after natural disasters. Deep skin wound fungal infection does not spread from human to human.

The Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services (MDHSS) has received reports of suspected deep skin fungal infection in individuals injured by the tornado in Joplin. The reported cases in Missouri all occurred in individuals who sustained trauma from the tornado with secondary wound infections. No cases were attributed to air, food, or water. MDHSS advises individuals who sustained trauma from the tornado and are experiencing symptoms including redness, tenderness, pain, and heat in the area of the wound, or fever should promptly visit their health care providers for evaluation and treatment as indicated.

Health care professionals should be alert to cases in which a patient who has a major clinical condition such as severe head injury, pneumothoraces, kidney injury, severe lacerations, bacterial sepsis, bacterial wound infections, and pneumonia with acute respiratory failure presents with a potential fungal infection. Patients with diabetes and patients with compromised immune system are also at increased risk of illness associated with such a fungal infection.

Assistance in diagnostic testing, such as identification of fungi from isolates or tissue specimens, is strongly encouraged by MDHSS and can be provided from CDC through the Missouri SPHL. MDHSS urges health care providers to promptly report cases of suspected deep skin wound fungal infection and other cases of unusual fungal infection among persons associated with the tornado to MDHSS or your local public health agency. MDHSS also urges health care providers to ship any suspected isolates or tissue specimens to the SPHL.

The point of contact at MDHSS is John Bos, MPH, senior epidemiologist at the MDHSS southwest district office (telephone: 417-895-6945; fax: 417-895-6959; email address: John.Bos@health.mo.gov).

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