

Information about *M. chimaera* for patients and parents of patients considering cardiac surgery

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The following FAQs will be updated as additional information is available. Please send your questions or comments to info@albertahealthservices.ca. Submitted questions will not be responded to individually; however, themes will be noted and responded to here.

What is the concern?

Health Canada and other agencies such as the United States' Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) are reporting a potential risk of infection due to bacteria called *Mycobacterium chimaera* (*M. chimaera*). These are common bacteria that may be found in water or soil but are very rare causes of infection.

M. chimaera is being linked with infections related to heater cooler units that are used routinely in open heart surgery to warm and cool blood during the operation. These heater cooler units are essential equipment required for open heart surgery and have been in use at the Foothills Medical Centre (Calgary), the Mazankowski Alberta Heart Institute (Edmonton) and Stollery Children's Hospital (Edmonton).

What should I discuss with my/my child's doctor prior to heart surgery?

There are risks associated with any surgical procedure. Your health care provider will ensure you are aware of the risks associated with your surgery, prior to the procedure. For most patients, the benefit of undergoing a surgical procedure outweighs the risk of infection. Your doctor will talk to you about what to expect following your/your child's procedure and when to seek medical attention, as well as what measures are being taken to minimize your/your child's risk of infection.

Should I postpone my/my child's surgical procedure?

Patients and parents/guardians of patients with concerns about infection risks should consult with their doctor. However, life-saving surgical procedures should not be delayed. Overall, the risk of *M. chimaera* is considered to be low (at this time, estimated to be between one in 100 and one in 1000).

What is Alberta Health Services (AHS) doing about this issue?

Patient safety is always our first priority. Our sites follow all manufacturer's instructions for use, maintenance and cleaning of the heater cooler units. We have implemented additional safety measures to further minimize risk to our patients at all sites that use these heater cooler units.

Why not stop using the machines?

Heater-cooler devices are essential in patient care. The benefits of temperature control during surgery outweigh the low risk of infection associated with these devices.

How are heater-cooler devices associated with infection?

Heater-cooler devices are used during heart surgery to warm or cool the blood. While these devices are not in direct contact with the patient's blood or body fluids, contaminated water droplets from the tank may transmit bacteria through the air (aerosolize) and land in the operating room environment, subsequently causing an extremely low risk of infection.

Does AHS use these machines?

AHS does use these heater cooler machines at the Stollery Children's Hospital and Mazankowski Alberta Heart Institute in Edmonton and at the Foothills Medical Centre in Calgary.

What is the risk of infection?

The risk of infection as a result of cardiac surgeries performed in Edmonton or Calgary is low. At this time, the risk is believed to be between one in 100 and one in 1000.

Are there any confirmed *M. chimaera* infections linked to surgeries performed in Alberta?

Yes. To date, there has been one *M. chimaera* infection identified in any AHS cardiac patients.

What if I have more questions?

We understand you may have additional questions related to this situation. For more information, please contact Health Link by dialing 811 or contact your cardiac care provider directly.