

Cardiac Surgery Heater Cooler Units – Potential Infection

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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. For health-related information, please contact Health Link by dialing 811 or contact your cardiac care provider directly.

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 now being linked with infections related to certain 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).

Has anyone been infected in Alberta?

Yes. There has been one documented case of *M. chimaera* infection in a cardiac surgery patient in Alberta.

What are the symptoms I need to be aware of?

M. chimaera infections are slow growing and can be very difficult to diagnose. Symptoms can be subtle and may take months or even years to develop. If you or a child in your care has undergone a cardiac procedure at Foothills Medical Center after January 1, 2013, or at the Mazankowski Alberta Heart Institute, or Stollery Children's Hospital after January 1, 2012, and you have concerns about worsening health, especially if you/they are experiencing ongoing symptoms of an infection such as those listed below, we encourage you to contact your cardiac healthcare provider or family physician to discuss further:

- fever
- unexplained, persistent and profuse night sweats
- unintentional weight loss
- muscle aches
- fatigue
- redness, heat or pus at the surgical incision site

It's important to know that the symptoms listed above are more likely to be caused by other health conditions or short-lived bacterial or viral infections than *M. chimaera*. While the risk of *M. chimaera* infection is low, it is important to consult with your doctor especially if these symptoms persist for more than a couple of weeks and you feel that your health is declining. You may want to print this and share it with your physician if you have had open heart surgery and are experiencing persistent symptoms.

What is the risk level?

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. To date, there has been one *M. chimaera* infection identified in an AHS cardiac patient.

Who is at risk?

If you or a child in your care have had cardiac surgery in Edmonton after January 2012 or in Calgary after January 2013, you could be at a low risk of *M. chimaera* infection.

Can these infections spread to other people?

No. *M. chimaera* infections can't be spread by person to person contact.

How can I be sure it's safe to have a cardiac procedure?

There are risks associated with any surgical procedure. Your health care provider will ensure you are aware of all the risks associated with your surgery, prior to the procedure.

Patient safety is always our first priority. Please be assured that 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.

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.