

Unexplained skin condition is non-infectious, not linked to environmental cause: CDC

January 25 2012

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has completed a comprehensive study of an unexplained skin condition commonly referred to as Morgellons and found no infectious agent and no evidence to suggest an environmental link. The full results are reported in the Jan. 25 issue of the online journal *PLoS ONE*.

In this study, investigators took an in-depth look at a skin condition characterized by unexplained lesions that contain fibers, threads, or other foreign material, accompanied by sensations of crawling, biting, or stinging. The condition is not currently recognized as a distinct clinical disorder with established diagnostic criteria. However, increasing inquiries to the CDC in 2006-2009 regarding the condition prompted the study in Northern California, where many of the persons who reported these symptoms lived.

The researchers found and enrolled 109 persons with symptoms of this condition by searching through the [electronic medical record](#) database of a large HMO. They conducted extensive testing to rule out infectious causes, and found no indication that the condition was attributed an infection. The researchers also determined that the fibers associated with the lesions were apparently fragments of cloth or other debris. The investigators showed that the condition is uncommon, estimating that it results in fewer than four out of 100,000 people seeking medical attention. About half of the [study participants](#) had evidence of other medical, most commonly psychiatric, illnesses.

The CDC suggests that people suffering with symptoms similar to those reported in the study should see their [health care provider](#) for a complete physical to ensure proper diagnosis of all illnesses, including psychiatric, and follow the recommended treatments.

"We found no evidence that this condition is contagious, or that suggests the need for additional testing for an infectious disease as a potential cause," says Dr. Mark Eberhard, Director of CDC's Division of [Parasitic Diseases](#) and Malaria and a lead study investigator. "This alleviates concerns about the condition being contagious between family members and others."

More information: Pearson ML, Selby JV, Katz KA, Cantrell V, Braden CR, et al. (2012) Clinical, Epidemiologic, Histopathologic and Molecular Features of an Unexplained Dermopathy. *PLoS ONE* 7(1): e29908. [doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0029908](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0029908)

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Citation: Unexplained skin condition is non-infectious, not linked to environmental cause: CDC (2012, January 25) retrieved 20 March 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2012-01-unexplained-skin-condition-non-infectious-linked.html>

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