

Steroid-meningitis toll now 32 dead, 438 sickened, CDC says

November 10 2012, by Steven Reinberg And Margaret Steele, Healthday Reporters

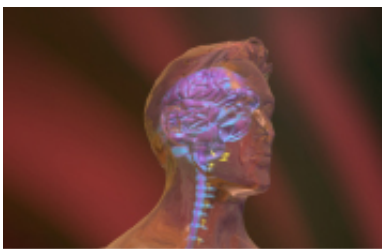


Image courtesy of Blausen Medical

Infections still limited to 19 states, with Michigan and Tennessee hit hardest.

(HealthDay)—Thirty-two people have now died and 438 have been sickened in the fungal meningitis outbreak linked to tainted steroid injections, U.S. health officials reported Friday.

The U.S. [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) had the following state-by-state breakdown of cases: Florida: 23 cases, including 3 deaths; Georgia, 1 case; Idaho, 1 case; Illinois, 2 cases; Indiana: 52 cases, including 4 deaths; Maryland: 23 cases, including 1 death; Michigan: 128 cases, including 7 deaths; Minnesota: 11 cases; New Hampshire: 13 cases; New Jersey: 27 cases; New York: 1 case; North Carolina: 3 cases, including 1 death; Ohio: 16 cases; Pennsylvania: 1 case; Rhode Island: 3 cases; South Carolina: 1 case; Tennessee: 81 cases, including 13 deaths; Texas: 2 cases; Virginia: 50 cases, including 2 deaths.

Ten of the 438 cases involve what the [CDC](#) calls "peripheral joint infection," meaning an infection in a knee, hip, shoulder or elbow. These joint infections aren't considered as dangerous as injections near the spine for back pain that have been linked to the potentially fatal meningitis infections.

Meningitis is inflammation of the lining surrounding the brain and [spinal cord](#). The [steroid injections](#) are used to treat pain in the lower back as well as joints.

Massachusetts officials said last week that they had put emergency regulations in place that give the state greater control and scrutiny over specialty pharmacies such as the New England Compounding Center, believed to be the source of the tainted steroid injections linked to the outbreak, according to published reports.

Infected patients have developed a range of symptoms approximately one to four weeks following their injection. People who have had a steroid injection since July, and have any of the following symptoms, should talk to their doctor as soon as possible: worsening headache, fever, sensitivity to light, stiff neck, new weakness or [numbness](#) in any part of your body or slurred speech, the CDC said.

The CDC and state health departments estimate that roughly 14,000 patients may have gotten steroid injections from the New England Compounding Center. All of the [fungal meningitis](#) patients identified so far were thought to be injected with the steroid methylprednisolone acetate, according to the CDC.

The New England Compounding Center is what's known as a compounding pharmacy. These pharmacies combine, mix or alter ingredients to create drugs to meet the specific needs of individual patients, according to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. Such

customized drugs are frequently required to fill special needs, such as a smaller dose, or the removal of an ingredient that might trigger an allergy in a patient.

Compounding pharmacies aren't subject to the same FDA oversight as regular drug manufacturers are, but some members of Congress say the [meningitis outbreak](#) highlights the need for more regulatory control.

More information: The U.S. National Library of Medicine has more about [injections for back pain](#).

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