$100 mln deal agreed over US meningitis outbreak

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The owners and insurers of a bankrupt pharmacy at the center of a deadly US meningitis outbreak have reached a tentative agreement to pay more than $100 million to compensate victims, US media reported Tuesday.

The fund will also serve to pay creditors of the New England Compounding Center, whose tainted drugs are blamed for dozens of deaths last year.

"We are working very hard to expedite this process and get money to victims as quickly as possible," bankruptcy trustee Paul Moore, who led the settlement negotiations, told The Boston Globe. "This is a first step, although a significant one."

The deal must first be finalized and approved by the US Bankruptcy Court.

At least 751 people in 20 states contracted fungal meningitis or other infections from steroid injections made by the pharmacy, including 64 people who died.

Victims and their families will likely receive at least tens of thousands of dollars on average under the settlement, according to the Globe. They have until January 15 to file claims with the bankruptcy court.

Authorities investigating the NECC have said that its now defunct

facility outside Boston made medications in unsanitary conditions with bacteria and mold so prevalent it could be seen with the naked eye.

The outbreak has led to calls for tighter regulation of the loosely controlled pharmaceutical compounding industry.

Critics say drug manufacturers have found a way to sidestep costly and strict oversight by classifying themselves as pharmacies, which are given freer rein to mix drug compounds for patients.

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