

Special drug rushed to help brain-eating amoeba patient (Update)

August 3 2016, by Jeffrey Collins

A pharmaceutical company has rushed a special drug that once saved the life of a girl who contracted a usually deadly brain-eating amoeba to a South Carolina hospital with its own patient fighting the disease.

A courier drove the drug, called miltefosine, six hours from the company's Orlando, Florida, headquarters to Charleston as soon as the hospital called around 10 p.m. Tuesday, Profounda CEO Todd MacLaughlan told The Associated Press.

"Time is of the essence," MacLaughlan said.

The patient in South Carolina was confirmed on Tuesday to have been exposed to *Naegleria fowleri* (nuh-GLEER'-ee-uh FOW'-lur-ee), a one-celled organism that can cause primary amebic meningoencephalitis, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported.

Between 2006 and 2015 there have been 37 infections in the United States. Only three people have been recorded to have survived exposure. Miltefosine was used to treat one of the survivors—a 12-year-old girl in Arkansas, the CDC said.

Miltefosine was originally developed to fight cancer in the 1980s. It also helps fight leishmaniasis, a disease caused by a parasite transmitted through sand flea bites in tropical climates, MacLaughlan said.

This is just the second time his company has sent the specialized drug

that costs about \$48,000 for a round of treatment to a hospital. It was delivered as capsules, MacLaughlan said.

Officials aren't releasing the name, age, sex or condition of the patient, currently being treated at the Medical University of South Carolina hospital in Charleston.

The patient appears to have been exposed to the amoeba while swimming July 24 near Martin's Landing on the Edisto River in Charleston County, South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control epidemiologist Linda Bell said in a news release.

The amoeba lives in many lakes, rivers and streams in warm water locations. There has to be a lot of force to send the water and amoeba into the brain, either by jumping into the water, or in a recent fatal case where an 18-year-old Ohio woman fell out of her raft in the churning waters at the U.S. National Whitewater Center in Charlotte, North Carolina.

Health officials recommend swimmers hold their noses or wear nose clips when jumping feet first into freshwater lakes and rivers, warning the lower the water level and the warmer the water, the greater the risk of contracting the amoeba.

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