

# ALERT: Cluster of Suspect Mycobacterium Infections in Campbellford

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Peterborough County-City  
**HEALTH UNIT**  
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## ATTENTION: Healthcare Providers

Some healthcare providers in Peterborough City and County treat patients who reside in the Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge (HKPR) District Health Unit area. The HKPR has been notified of a cluster of individuals in the Campbellford area experiencing a skin and soft tissue infection of the hands and arms possibly related to the handling/cleaning of raw shrimp. Based on clinical presentation and exposure history, these infections are suspected to be due to *Mycobacterium marinum* (*M. marinum*).

*M. marinum* is a slow growing atypical mycobacterium that is found in both salt water and fresh water. *M. marinum* infections, commonly known as fish tank granuloma, produce nodular or ulcerating skin lesions on the extremities. It is most commonly found among aquarium cleaners, fisherman and seafood handlers but has also been found to be associated with handling of raw fish/seafood during food preparation. The infection cannot be acquired by ingesting fish or seafood that carries *M. marinum* nor can it be transmitted person to person (i.e., is not contagious).



## What providers should do?

- Suspect and arrange biopsy and treatment of *M. marinum* infection in patients with erythematous, tender subcutaneous nodules of skin or soft tissue infections who report having handled raw fish or seafood.
- Report all suspect or confirmed cases to the public health unit where they live. Peterborough city and county residents should be called to 705-743-1000. Residents of Campbellford should be reported to the HKPR district public health office at 905-885-9100.
- Consult with an Infectious Disease specialist before commencing treatment and commence treatment after the lesions have been biopsied.

## What laboratory testing should be performed?

- Submit biopsy specimens through the nearest Public Health Ontario Laboratory (PHOL) for processing and testing at the PHOL-Toronto. Indicate "Mycobacterial culture" and for diagnostic information please also indicate "Query *Mycobacterium marinum*". Please do not submit purulent swabs.
- Collect a minimum 4 mm punch biopsy of a representative skin lesion (at least 2 -3 biopsies if possible).
- Collect aseptically, do not wrap in gauze, select caseous portion if available and do not freeze; if delay in transportation is anticipated, store at 2 – 8°C but transportation to the laboratory should be done as soon as possible. A small amount of sterile saline may be added.
- Specimens should also be submitted for histopathology, bacterial culture and susceptibilities through your local laboratory provider (this service is not performed by the Public Health Ontario Laboratories).

## How should the infection be treated?

In patients with clinically compatible illnesses, providers should treat empirically for *M. marinum* and not wait for laboratory confirmation. Consult with an Infectious Disease specialist before commencing treatment and commence treatment after the lesions have been biopsied.

A standard treatment of choice has not been recognized for *M. marinum* skin and soft tissue infections. However, antimicrobial therapy is the mainstay of treatment. The duration of therapy is not well defined, but treatment of skin and soft tissue infections should be continued for 1-2 months after resolution of symptoms and lesions. Therefore, the treatment duration is typically 3-4 months, longer if deeper structures are involved.

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