For Immediate Release

To: Local Media
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Meningitis Associated with Steroid Injection

Kingsford- The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has announced that there are now 105 cases of fungal meningitis and 8 deaths associated with the medical use of an injectable steroid produced by the New England Compounding Center (NECC) in Framingham, Massachusetts. Investigation is on-going and case numbers are changing daily. None of the medication in question was distributed in the Upper Peninsula.

Meningitis is an inflammation of the membrane covering the brain and spinal cord and it can be caused by infection with many different organisms. In this case, the infections are being caused by fungus, which is an unusual cause of meningitis. Because these infections are unusual, they were reported by healthcare providers to the CDC, which began an investigation in conjunction with state and local public health.

Steroid medications are used to treat a variety of medical problems, however, in this case, all patients received the medication as an epidural injection, meaning it was injected into a fluid space that surrounds the spinal cord. Epidural steroids are used to treat issues such as low back pain and are a typically very safe.

Unfortunately, it appears that certain lots of a steroid medication produced by NECC and used for epidural injections, may have been contaminated with fungus during the production process, leading to infection in some patients. According to Dr. Frankovich, there are a few very important things for people in our area to know, “Fortunately, with computerized systems, it is very easy to track medication from factory to medical facilities and then to patients. Although this is a commonly used medication, it is produced by more than one company and only three lots of the medication from one particular company are implicated. None of these doses were distributed in the Upper Peninsula.” The medication has been recalled by the company so no additional patients should be exposed.

In cases identified to date, symptoms of meningitis have typically begun 1-4 weeks after an epidural injection and may include fever, worsening headache, stiff neck, weakness or numbness. Unlike meningitis caused by many bacteria, this fungal meningitis tends to have a more gradual onset and symptoms may be mild, at least early on. These infections are not spread person to person, so only people who received these injections can become ill. “This is a good example of the importance of the public health system in this country,” says Frankovich, “it is only because these unusual cases are reported and investigated that patterns emerge and steps can be quickly taken to limit risk to the other patients.”

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