

# **Mycobacterium**

## **What is Mycobacterium?**

Mycobacterium is a bacterium distantly related to the ones that cause tuberculosis and Hansen's Disease (Leprosy). It is part of a group of environmental mycobacteria and is found in water, soil, and dust. It has been known to contaminate medications and products, including medical devices.

## **What kind of germ is Mycobacterium?**

Mycobacterium abscessus is a bacterium distantly related to the ones that cause tuberculosis and leprosy. It is part of a group known as rapidly growing mycobacteria and is found in water, soil, and dust. It has been known to contaminate medications and products, including medical devices.

## **Diagnosis of Mycobacterium**

Diagnosis is made by growing this bacterium in the laboratory from a sample of the pus or biopsy of the infected area. When the infection is severe, the bacterium can be found in the blood and isolated from a blood sample. To make the diagnosis, your healthcare provider will have to take a sample from the infected area and/or blood and send it to a laboratory for identification. It is important that persons who have any evidence of infection at a site where they received procedures, such as surgery or injections, let their doctors know so the appropriate tests can be done.

## **Treatment of Mycobacterium**

Treatment of infections due to *M. abscessus* consists of draining collections of pus or removing the infected tissue and administering the appropriate combination of antibiotics for a prolonged period. Infection with this bacterium usually does not improve with the usual antibiotics used to treat skin infections. Testing the bacteria against different antibiotics is helpful in guiding doctors to the most appropriate treatment for each patient.

## **Are there any long-term effects of Mycobacterium?**

*M. abscessus* can cause a variety of infections. Healthcare-associated infections due to this bacterium are usually of the skin and the soft tissues under the skin. It is also a cause of serious lung infections in persons with various chronic lung diseases, such as cystic fibrosis. People with open wounds or who receive injections without appropriate skin disinfection may be at risk for infection by *M. abscessus*. Rarely, individuals with underlying respiratory conditions or impaired immune systems are at risk of lung infection.

## **How can humans get Mycobacterium?**

Transmission of *M. abscessus* can occur in several ways. Infection with *M. abscessus* is usually caused by injections of substances contaminated with the bacterium or through invasive medical procedures employing contaminated equipment or material. Infection can also occur after accidental injury where the wound is contaminated by soil. There is very little risk of transmission from person to person.

## **Prevention of Mycobacterium**

Anyone who touches or cares for the infected site should wash their hands carefully with soap and water. Patients should follow all instructions given by their healthcare provider following any surgery or medical procedure. Avoid receiving procedures or injections by unlicensed persons.