November 2012

Meningitis Outbreak Death Toll Rising

October 2012 --- About 13,000 Americans got the contaminated steroid pain shots linked to a deadly outbreak of fungal Meningitis. So far, eight people have died. There have been 105 reported cases in nine states:
- Florida: 4 cases
- Indiana: 11 cases
- Maryland: 5 cases, including 1 death
- Michigan: 21 cases, including 2 deaths
- Minnesota: 3 cases
- North Carolina: 2 cases
- Ohio: 1 case
- Tennessee: 35 cases, including 4 deaths
- Virginia: 23 cases, including 1 death

The pharmacy that filled the contaminated syringes is the New England Compounding Center (NECC). The complete list of recalled NECC drugs includes medicines such as antibiotics, nipple ointment, and eye drops. So far, no patient taking these drugs has developed a fungal infection. None of the cases of fungal meningitis has been traced to these drugs.

Seventy-five clinics in 23 states received shipment of NECC steroids shots in the three lots most closely linked to the outbreak. Most of these shots were what doctors call epidural spinal injections. It’s a very common treatment for lower back pain or sciatica. NECC shipped 17,676 one-dose vials of the suspect drug. The CDC says about 13,000 doses were given to patients. Women who get epidural pain shots during childbirth get a different kind of pain drug than the one linked to this outbreak. Only people who received contaminated drugs are in this outbreak of fungal meningitis. The infection cannot spread from one person to another.

Symptoms of Fungal Meningitis

If you suspect you may have received a dose of contaminated medicine, contact the health provider who gave it to you. Ask if the medication came from NECC. All NECC products carry the NECC logo.

Clinics that gave the suspect shots are contacting all patients to warn them to look out for symptoms.

These symptoms may be very mild. At first, most patients only feel a little worse than usual. For example, patients with back pain may feel slightly worse pain, or slightly more weakness. The CDC warns patients who have had a spinal steroid shot since May 21, 2012, to call a doctor immediately if they have any of these symptoms:
- New or worsening headache
- Fever
- Sensitivity to light
- Stiff neck
- New weakness or numbness in any part of your body
- Slurred speech
- Increased pain, redness, or swelling at your injection site

Treatment of fungal meningitis is complicated. Antifungal drugs must be given intravenously, usually in the hospital. Treatment often last for several months, and can have serious side effects.

Source: http://www.webmd.com

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Weakness or fatigue
“I kept having to sit down to work, and one night I was too tired to drive home,” said one woman in describing the fatigue and that led her to discover she had leukemia. Generalized fatigue and weakness is a symptom of so many different kinds of cancer that you’ll need to look at it in combination with other symptoms. But any time you feel exhausted without explanation and it doesn’t respond to getting more sleep, talk to your doctor.

Bloating or abdominal weight gain—the “my jeans don’t fit” syndrome
While this might sound too common a phenomenon to be considered a cancer symptom, consider this: Woman diagnosed with ovarian cancer overwhelmingly reports that unexplained abdominal bloating that came on fairly suddenly and continued on and off over a long period of time is one of the main ways they knew something was wrong.

Feeling full or unable to eat
This is another tip-off to ovarian cancer; women say they have no appetite and can’t eat, even when they haven’t eaten for some time. Any woman who experiences noticeable bloating or weight gaining numerous times should call her doctor and ask for a pelvic ultrasound.

Pelvic or abdominal pain
Taken by itself, pelvic pain can mean a lot of things. In fact, because it’s common symptom of fibroids, ovarian cysts and other reproductive tract disorders, doctors don’t always think of cancer when you describe pelvic pain. Make sure your doctor looks at all possible explanations and does a full exam, since pain and cramping in the pelvis and abdomen can go hand in hand with bloating that often signals ovarian cancer. Leukemia can also cause abdominal pain resulting from an enlarged spleen.

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20 Cancer Symptoms Women Are Likely to Ignore (cont.)

Rectal bleeding or blood in stool
“I thought it was hemorrhoids” is one of the most common things doctors hear when diagnosing colorectal cancer. Blood in the toilet alone is reason to call your doctor and schedule a colonoscopy.

Upset stomach or stomachache
As simple as it sounds, a good old fashioned bellyache is what tipped off a number of lucky folks, whose doctors ordered ultrasounds and discovered early that they had tumors on their livers. Stomach cramps or frequent upset stomach may indicate colorectal cancer; many cancer patients say their doctors thought they had ulcers.

A red, sore, or swollen breast
Everyone knows to check for lumps in the breasts, but too often overlooked are symptoms closer to the surface, which can indicate inflammatory breast cancer. Some women described noticing cellulite like dimpled skin on an area of the breast. Others notice that a breast felt swollen, hot or irritated. Red or purplish discoloration is also cause for concern. Call your doctor about any unexplained changes to your breast.

Nipple changes
One of the most common charges women remember noticing before being diagnosed with breast cancer is a nipple that began to appear flattened, inverted, or turned sideways. “My nipple started looking like it was turned inside out.” Said one woman. In addition, inflammatory breast cancer also cause nipple problems, such as itchy, scaly, or crusty skin on the nipple –so take any changes seriously.

Unusually heavy or painful period or bleeding between periods
Many women reported this as the tip-off to endometrial or uterine cancer. Unfortunately, many women said their doctors weren’t responsive, overlooking or misdiagnosing their complaints as normal prim menopause. Ask for a transvaginal ultrasound if you suspect something more than routine heavy periods.

Swelling of facial features
Some patients with lung cancer report noticing puffiness, swelling or redness in the face. The explanation for this is that small cell lung tumors commonly block blood vessels in the chest, preventing blood from flowing freely from the head and face.

A sore or skin lump that doesn’t heal, becomes crusty, or bleeds easily
Most of us know to watch moles for changes that might indicate skin cancer. But other signs, such as small waxy lumps or dry scaly patches, are easier to miss. Familiarize yourself with different types of skin cancer and be vigilant about checking skin all over the body.

Changes in nails
Unexplained changes to the fingernails can be a sign of several types of cancer. A brown or black streak or dot under the nail can indicate skin cancer, while newly discovered enlargement of the ends of the fingers, with nails that curve down over the tips can be sign of lung cancer. Pale or white nails can be sometimes a sign of liver cancer.

Pain in the back or lower right side
As vague as this sounds, many cancer patients say this was the first sign of liver cancer, known as one of the “silent killers” (another is ovarian cancer). Breast cancer is also often diagnosed via back pain, which can occur when a breast tumor presses backward into the chest, or when the cancer spreads to the spine or ribs.

Source: http://www.rd.com
Tomatoes may help reduce stroke risk

Eating tomatoes in your daily salad or regularly enjoying a healthy red sauce on your spaghetti could help reduce your risk of stroke, according to research published this week in the journal of Neurology. Tomatoes contain a powerful antioxidant that is good for brain health, the researchers say, and cooked tomatoes seem to offer more protection than raw. This study adds to the evidence that a diet high in fruits and vegetables is associated with a lower risk of stroke," says study author Jouni Karppi, of the University of Eastern Finland in Kuopio. "A diet containing tomatoes... a few times a week would be good for our health. However, daily intake of tomatoes may give better protection." The chemical lycopene gives tomatoes and other fruits/vegetables their rich red color, that is helping to protect the brain. Tomatoes are particularly high in the powerful antioxidant that acts like a sponge, soaking up rogue molecules called free radicals that if left unchecked can damage cells.

The study
Researchers tested the level of lycopene in the blood of more than 1,000 Finnish men aged 46 to 65, starting in 1991. Scientists then followed the men on average for more than a decade to record the number who had strokes. The scientists found that those with the highest levels of lycopene were 55% less likely to have a stroke than those with the lowest amounts in their blood.

Caveats
Though the study looks promising, experts say that we can't necessarily give all of the credit to lycopene. It's a compelling study and it fits with other data that we have about risk of stroke and vegetable and fruit consumption. The group of men who had fewer strokes were younger, had lower blood pressure, and smoked less than the group more prone to stroke. Though the researchers tried to take these lifestyle factors into account when calculating their findings, it may be that these things influenced the outcomes.

More on lycopene
Lycopene has attracted a lot of attention in recent years because it's such a powerful antioxidant. If we don't eat enough lycopene-packed foods, experts suspect too many free radicals get left in the body, damaging blood vessels by helping to form fatty deposits. When these deposits build up, a blockage forms. If that vessel is in the brain, the blockage can cause a stroke.

Tomatoes could contribute to reducing stroke in other ways, because they are a good source of potassium, which is known to reduce blood pressure. Elevated blood pressure is major risk factor for stroke.

Take home message
So are lycopene packed tomatoes really the magic fruit? It seems the jury is still out, but researchers suggest we eat healthy as they continue to search for answers. This is one more reason to consume fruits and vegetables - at least 5 a day - and it's good to include tomatoes in that mix.