



To: CAHAN San Diego Participants  
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From: Epidemiology Program, Public Health Services

### **Carbapenem-resistant *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* Infections after Surgery in Tijuana**

This health alert informs providers about a recent [level 2 travel alert](#) issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) regarding carbapenem-resistant *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* (CRPA) infections linked to surgeries in Tijuana, Mexico. Recommendations for local healthcare professionals and resource links are provided.

#### **Key Points:**

- U.S. residents returning from Tijuana, Mexico after having invasive medical procedures have recently been diagnosed with CRPA infections. About half of those infected had their surgery performed at Grand View Hospital in Tijuana.
- Travelers to Tijuana should not have surgery at Grand View Hospital until public health authorities can confirm that CRPA is no longer there.
- Individuals planning to go abroad for medical procedures should consult with their local providers prior to departure and follow CDC medical tourism [travel advice](#).
- Patients with infections after surgery in Mexico (or other overseas locations) should be tested for CRPA and should be handled with appropriate infection control.
- Providers should report CRPA infections after surgical procedures at foreign healthcare facilities to the County Epidemiology Program and arrange to test CRPA specimens for resistance mechanism via the County Public Health Laboratory.

#### **Situation**

CDC has received reports of serious CRPA infections in U.S. residents who had invasive medical procedures (primarily weight-loss surgery) in Tijuana. The implicated pathogen in the current cluster has a resistance mechanism due to metallo- $\beta$ -lactamase encoded by a mobile genetic element known as the Verona integrin (VIM). About half of those infected with these bacteria had surgery at Grand View Hospital in Tijuana. The others became infected after surgery at other hospitals and clinics in Tijuana. To date, no San Diego or California residents have been reported in this VIM-CRPA cluster.

Infections caused by CRPA are uncommon in the United States and difficult to treat. CDC [recommends](#) that travelers to Mexico not have surgery (including weight-loss surgery) at Grand View Hospital in Tijuana, until Mexican health officials can confirm that CRPA is no longer there. The surgical wing of hospital was closed on December 19, 2018.

## Background

Traveling abroad for medical care is increasingly common. Medical and surgical procedures done anywhere (including the United States) carry some risk and can result in complications, including infection. Prior to travel, CDC recommends that individuals consult a local travel medicine specialist at least a month before departure. Travelers should consult their own physician and [research](#) the foreign provider who will perform any planned procedure, as well as the clinic or hospital where the care will be provided.

## Recommendations for Providers

- Advise patients who are seeking medical care outside the United States to research the foreign provider and to avoid having any procedures at Grand View Hospital until the facility has been verified to be clear of CRPA by Mexican health officials.
- Be vigilant for the possibility of resistant infections occurring in patients who have traveled abroad for medical procedures, especially those with a history of invasive procedures in Tijuana.
- Perform rectal screening for carbapenemase-producing organisms when admitting patients who have a history of overnight stays in foreign healthcare facilities.
  - This recommendation applies to patients hospitalized outside the U.S. at any time during the six months before their local hospital admission.
  - Consider placing such patients in isolation and contact precautions while awaiting screening results.
  - Rectal screening is available through the [County Public Health Laboratory](#). Call (619) 692-8500, option 1 or [email](#) for information on proper specimen collection, storage and transport.
- Obtain cultures and perform antimicrobial susceptibility testing to guide treatment of infections in patients who have a history of having undergone invasive procedures.
- Place patients from whom VIM-CRPA is isolated (regardless of specimen source) in isolation on contact precautions, and ask them about receipt of healthcare outside the U.S., including medical tourism, in the six months prior to positive culture.
- Consult with an infectious disease specialist when caring for patients with CRPA. CRPA infections are difficult to treat, requiring protracted and complex antibacterial drug combinations and courses.
- Report cases of any surgical site infections in patients who have recently undergone surgery in foreign medical facilities. Call the [County Epidemiology Program](#) during normal business hours at 619-692-8499 (Mon-Fri 8 AM to 5 PM) or fax a [Confidential Morbidity Report](#) to 858-715-6458.
- Test any carbapenem-resistant *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* or Enterobacteriaceae for VIM and other plasmid-mediated carbapenemases.
  - Mechanism testing for VIM and other plasmid-mediated carbapenemases may be arranged via the County Public Health Laboratory after approval by the County Epidemiology Program.
  - Call (619) 692-8500, option 1 or [email](#) for information on proper specimen collection, storage and transport.

## Resources

- [CDC Travel Alert on Drug-resistant Infections in Mexico](#)
- [CDC Clinician Information on Medical Tourism](#)

- [CDC Traveler Information on Medical Tourism](#)
- CDC website: [Carbapenem-resistant Enterobacteriaceae in Healthcare Settings](#)
- CDC toolkit: [Facility Guidance for Control of Carbapenem-resistant Enterobacteriaceae \(CRE\) – November 2015 Update](#)
- California Department of Public Health website: [Hospital Acquired Infection Program](#)

Thank you for your participation.

**CAHAN San Diego**

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