



To: CAHAN San Diego Participants
Date: November 19, 2019
From: Epidemiology Program, Public Health Services

Health Advisory: Ongoing Risk of Highly Drug-Resistant Infections in Patients Following Hospitalization or Invasive Procedures in Tijuana, Mexico

The California Department of Public Health (CDPH) released the attached health advisory yesterday regarding the ongoing risk of highly drug resistance infections in patients following hospitalization or invasive procedures in hospitals in Tijuana, Mexico.

Fifteen cases of carbapenem-resistant *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* (CRPA) infections have been reported to date in 2019 in San Diego County that are linked to previous hospitalizations in Tijuana, Mexico. Five of these cases were determined to have had carbapenem resistance due to Verona integron-encoded metallo- β -lactamase (VIM), while the others had other resistance mechanisms. The most recent CRPA case was hospitalized in Tijuana in October, while the most recent case with carbapenem resistance due to VIM had surgery in Tijuana in August.

Recommendations for Providers

- **Advise** patients who are seeking medical care outside the United States to research the foreign provider.
- **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 12 months before their local hospital admission.
 - Consider placing such patients in isolation and contact precautions while awaiting screening results, especially those with infections after invasive procedures in Tijuana.
 - 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 invasive procedures.

- **Isolate with contact precautions** patients from whom carbapenemase-producing organisms are obtained, regardless of specimen source or mechanism of resistance. Ask these patients about receipt of healthcare outside the U.S. in the 12 months prior to positive culture.
- **Consult** with an infectious disease specialist when caring for patients with carbapenemase-producing organisms. These infection may be difficult to treat, and may require protracted and complex antibacterial drug combinations and courses.
- **Report all cases** of carbapenemase-producing organisms and any case of a surgical site infection 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.
- **Refer** to additional response measures in the recently updated [CDC Interim Guidance](#) on containing novel or targeted multidrug-resistant organisms.

Resources

- [CDC Interim Guidance for a Public Health Response to Contain Novel or Targeted Multidrug-resistant Organisms \(MDROs\) – January 2019 Update](#)
- CDC website: [Carbapenem-resistant Enterobacteriaceae in Healthcare Settings](#)
- CDC toolkit: [Facility Guidance for Control of Carbapenem-resistant Enterobacteriaceae \(CRE\) – November 2015 Update](#)
- [CDC Clinician Information on Medical Tourism](#)
- [CDC Traveler Information on Medical Tourism](#)
- CDPH website: [Hospital Acquired Infection Program](#)
- CDPH website: [Carbapenem-resistant Enterobacteriaceae \(CRE\) for Public Health and Healthcare Providers](#)

Thank you for your participation.

CAHAN San Diego

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CDPH and local public health partners are alerting healthcare providers to the ongoing risk of highly drug-resistant infections in patients following hospitalization or invasive procedures in Tijuana, Mexico, not limited to medical tourism. A previous outbreak of surgical site infections with VIM-producing carbapenem-resistant *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* (VIM-CRPA) primarily associated with bariatric surgery at Grand View Hospital (<https://www.cdc.gov/hai/outbreaks/pseudomonas-aeruginosa.html>) was deemed over and CDC removed its travel advisory. However, CDC and multiple state and local health departments continue to receive reports of VIM-CRPA infections in patients following surgeries and invasive procedures at several different hospitals in Tijuana. Five cases of VIM-CRPA infections have been identified in patients with healthcare exposures in Tijuana-area hospitals and subsequently hospitalized in San Diego. The most recent case had a surgery in a Tijuana-area hospital in August 2019.

The CDPH Healthcare-Associated Infections (HAI) Program recommends healthcare providers be vigilant for the possibility of VIM-CRPA and other resistant infections in patients following hospitalization or invasive procedures in Tijuana, not limited to medical tourism. The need for vigilance applies to anywhere in California where binational patients or medical tourists might return and seek care. The CDPH HAI Program recommends the following measures to identify and control the spread of resistant organisms in California:

- When caring for patients who have a history of hospitalization or invasive procedure in Mexico, obtain cultures, perform antimicrobial susceptibility testing to guide treatment, and test any carbapenem-resistant bacteria for VIM and other plasmid-mediated carbapenemases. VIM-CRPA are highly resistant and difficult to treat, requiring protracted and complex antibacterial drug combinations and courses; consult with an infectious disease specialist for treatment guidance.
- Perform rectal screening for carbapenemase-producing organisms when admitting patients who have a history of overnight stays in healthcare facilities outside the United States during the 12 months before their US-based hospital admission. Consider placing such patients in isolation and Contact precautions while awaiting screening results.



- Place patients from whom VIM-CRPA is isolated (regardless of specimen source) in isolation on Contact precautions, and ask about receipt of healthcare in Mexico or anywhere outside the U.S., including medical tourism, in the 12 months prior to positive culture. Note that infection control measures including Contact precautions may still be required for patients with highly resistant organisms that test negative for carbapenemase.
- Report any cases of VIM-CRPA or other unusual or highly resistant organisms to your local health department and the CDPH HAI Program at HAIPprogram@cdph.ca.gov.

Carbapenemase mechanism testing for carbapenem-resistant bacteria is available via some local public health laboratories and the CDPH Microbial Diseases Laboratory. Rectal screening for carbapenemases is available free of charge via the CDC Antibiotic Resistance Laboratory Network and can be accessed through your local health department in consultation with the CDPH HAI Program by contacting HAIPprogram@cdph.ca.gov. The California AR Lab-Epi Alliance website (https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CHCQ/HAI/Pages/CA_ARLN.aspx) includes information about these testing resources.