

**Communicable Disease Epidemiology  
and Immunization Section**

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**Health Advisory: Atypical Mycobacterial Skin Infections Associated with Tattooing -  
February 21, 2012**

**Action requested:**

- **Consider atypical mycobacterial infections in patients who have been tattooed since May, 2011 and developed chronic, refractory or atypical lesions, particularly if refractory to empiric treatment for common bacterial pathogens.**
- **For suspected cases, consider biopsy and culture for nontuberculous mycobacterial infections.**
- **Consider dermatology and/or infectious disease consultation.**
- **Educate patients on the importance of sterile piercing/tattooing procedures and proper skin care.**
- **Report suspected and confirmed cases to Public Health – Seattle & King County (PHSKC) at (206) 296-4774.**

**Background**

Public Health is aware of two cases of *Mycobacterium abscessus/massiliensis* skin infection in adults who were tattooed in October, 2011. In addition, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Food and Drug Administration are currently investigating a cluster of *Mycobacterium chelonae* infections associated with tattooing.

Atypical mycobacterial infections may appear between 1–3 weeks after tattooing. If you have seen patients with chronic or atypical skin lesions after being tattooed since May 2011, consider the diagnosis of atypical mycobacterial infection, particularly if refractory to empiric therapy for common causes of skin and soft tissue infection. Please call us at the number above to report suspected or confirmed cases or for consultation regarding diagnostic evaluation.

**Resources**

- Kappel S, Cotlair J.. Inoculation of *Mycobacterium chelonae* from a tattoo. *J AM Acad Derm*, May 2011  
<http://download.journals.elsevierhealth.com/pdfs/journals/0190-9622/PIIS0190962209010615.pdf>
- Piersimoni C, Scarparo C. Extrapulmonary infections associated with nontuberculous mycobacteria in immunocompetent persons. *Emerg Infect Dis*. 2009;15:1351–8.
- Ferringer T, Pride H, Tyler W. Body piercing complicated by atypical mycobacterial infections. *Pediatr Dermatol*. 2008;25:219–22.
- Preda VA, Maley M, Sullivan JR. *Mycobacterium chelonae* infection in a tattoo site. *Med J Aust*. 2009;190:278–9.
- Kay MK, Perti TR, Duchin JS. Tattoo-associated *Mycobacterium haemophilum* skin infection in immunocompetent adult, 2009. *Emerg Infect Dis* 2011 Sep; 17(9):1734-36
- *Mycobacterium abscessus* infection in a healthcare setting:  
<http://www.cdc.gov/hai/organisms/mycobacterium.html>