San Francisco — A water-borne mycobacterium that infects humans through breaks in the skin causes lesions that easily are mistaken for staphylococcal infection, Dr. Peggy Weintraub said at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Pediatrics.

Mycobacterium marinum infection causes what’s commonly known as “fish tank granuloma,” said Dr. Weintraub, chief of pediatric infectious diseases at the University of California, San Francisco. Lesions typically appear 1-4 weeks after exposure and start out as little papules and nodules that can be misdiagnosed as a staph infection. Later, however, they become verrucous, plaquelike lesions that start spreading up the skin along lymphatic tracts.

She described a case in a 3-year-old boy who presented with mild eczema and some other long-standing, crusting lesions on his hand and arm that were spreading up the arm lymphocutaneously. The lesions had not responded to previous treatment with cephalaxin. A previous culture from the lesions did grow some staphylococcal organisms, but two additional courses of antibiotics did not affect the lesions.

The boy was afebrile and systemically well, and had an infant sibling at home with no lesions.

The patient’s history helped point clinicians toward M. marinum. The boy liked to be helpful, assisting his mother with everything, including gardening and cleaning the family’s fish tank. M. marinum infects fish and amphibians. “You can sometimes get a history of a fish tank, but you also can get a different M. marinum infection, affecting bones or joint tendon sheaths. “Particularly on the hand, it’s a very worrisome diagnosis,” Dr. Weintraub said.

If a lesion is oozing, the secretions can be cultured for M. marinum. A skin biopsy from the boy grew the organism. Histopathology will show granulomas. Patients with the infection often are purified protein derivative (PPD) positive.

Patient history also can help sort through the differential diagnoses. A history of gardening raises the possibility of Sporothrix schenckii infection, which produces lesions that look very similar to M. marinum lesions, with a lymphocutaneous spread. S. schenckii resides in decayed vegetation, moss, soil, wood, and hay. It is more a disease of adults (typically farmers, gardeners, and forestry workers) than of children, with a history of skin trauma in 10%-60% of cases. A history of travel may suggest Leishmania, a parasite.

Usually two or three drugs are used to treat M. marinum infection, although no controlled studies back these strategies. “There aren’t really good guidelines” on which drugs to use or for how long, she said. Regimens may include clarithromycin, ethambutol, rifampin, and/or minocycline or doxycycline (for older patients).

In general, 1-2 months of treatment may suffice, but 3 months of therapy was needed for the boy’s lesions to clear completely. Localized infection is more likely to clear up than is deep infection. In rare cases, surgery may be needed to remove infected tissue.

Mumps Can Occur Even Among the Vaccinated, Recent Outbreak Proves

BY TIMOTHY F. KIRN
Sacramento Bureau

Mumps outbreaks can occur even among highly vaccinated populations, according to a report on a summer camp outbreak in 2005.

The outbreak had 31 confirmed cases, and 15% were known to have had two doses of mumps vaccine. Analysis indicated two doses of mumps vaccine were 92% effective in preventing mumps. A single dose was 80% effective (Pediatrics 2007:120 doct.10.1542/ pedi.2006-1451).

Nine cases occurred in individuals who had never been vaccinated, said Dr. Joshua K. Schaf- fin of the New York State Department of Health, Albany, and his colleagues.

According to a previous report on the outbreak, the index case was a 20-year-old male camp counselor from the United Kingdom who had never been vaccinated against mumps.

On June 30, 2005, about 11 days after his arrival, he was noted in the camp infirmary for a left-sided parotitis, sore throat, and a low-grade fever.

At the time, a mumps epidemic was occurring in the United Kingdom. But mumps was not considered, and the counselor continued work.

During July 15-23, an additional 25 cases of parotitis were seen. On July 26, the New York State Department of Health became aware of the outbreak; cases were isolated, and the camp was quarantined.

According to the new report, 341 persons were at the camp that summer, including 368 campers whose age was 12, and 173 staff members, whose median age was 21. Of the campers, all had received at least one mumps vaccination, and all but two had two doses. Of the staff, 21 had never been vaccinated.

Thirty-one cases of mumps were identified in the camp. Twenty-six met case definitions for mumps, and six were tested for mumps IgG and IgM. Five of those six were positive for both.

Of the 368 campers, all had received at least one vaccine and all but two had received two.

Two-Hour Blood Test for MRSA Approved by FDA

BY ROBERT FINN
San Francisco Bureau

T he Food and Drug Adminis-
tration has recently approved the first rapid blood test for methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA).

The test, which is called the BD GeneOhm Staph SR, can detect both methicillin-resistant S. aureus (MRSA) and more common and less dangerous strains of the staph bacterium in just 2 hours.

Manufactured by BD Diagno-
tics, a subsidiary of BD of Franklin Lakes, N.J., the test uses polymerase chain reaction techniques to detect a gene sequence that is unique to the drug-resistant strain of S. aureus. Traditional microbiology-based cultures require 24-72 hours to return results.

In 2005, BD received approval for a similar test, the BD GeneOhm MRSA Assay, which can detect MRSA in nasal specimens. That test is used primarily to screen for the presence of asymptomatic MRSA in patients who are about to enter the hospital so that preventive measures can be taken.

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In addition, the FDA warned that the test results should not be used as the sole basis for diagnosis, since positive results may reflect the bacteria’s presence in patients who have already been successfully treated for staph infections.

Furthermore, the agency cautioned, the test will not rule out other complicating conditions or infections.