

Dental water system linked to severe oral infections in California children

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Update: On September 30, the County of Orange Health Care Agency announced that the number of cases involved has increased from 22 to 25.

Nearly two dozen cases of children suspected or confirmed to have life-threatening *Mycobacterium abscessus* infections have been linked to an Anaheim, California dental office.

On September 15, the County of Orange Health Care Agency ordered the Children's Dental Group of Anaheim to "cease the use of that facility's on-site water system for any patient dental procedures." (1) The agency's laboratory has confirmed that multiple samples from the practice's water system have tested positive for mycobacterium similar to the kind believed to have sickened the children.



The children involved all received pulpotomies over the last several months; the practice's website states that they are contacting the parents of all patients who have received this treatment since April 2. (2)

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According to the *Orange County Register*, Sam Gruenbaum, the CEO of the group practice, "has previously said the clinic practiced industry-standard sanitation practices." (3)

The Health Care Agency has stipulated that the following requirements are to be met before the order to cease use of the water system will be lifted:

- The facility must provide a written plan for replacement of the current on-site water system for review and approval by HCA.
- Upon HCA-approval of the plan, the facility must fully implement the plan to replace all equipment that could potentially be a source of *Mycobacterium* as indicated by laboratory testing.
- All on-site water system renovation and replacement must be reviewed by HCA, including laboratory testing as appropriate, to assure patient safety. (1)

The consequences of these *M. abscessus* infections have been severe. The Health Care Agency reports that the children involved in all 22 cases have

been hospitalized at some point. The *Orange County Register* states that many of these children are on long-term IV antibiotics, and some have even required the removal of sections of jaw and permanent teeth. (4, 5)

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This is not the first time pediatric patients have been sickened by contaminated water lines. In September 2015, several children in Atlanta, Georgia were diagnosed with cervical and/or submandibular lymphadenitis and/or osteomyelitis of the mandible. The Georgia Public Health Department traced the infections to contaminated water in a pediatric dental practice.

DentistryIQ will be following the development of this outbreak.

Editor's note: For a broader discussion of the risks of contamination of dental water lines, please see the NPR article "[Infection Outbreak Shines Light On Water Risks At Dentists' Offices,](#)" published September 30.

References

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