



Wednesday, January 02, 2013

## **Possible *Coccidioides* exposure to lab workers due to contamination of commercial cell culture tubes**

**Target audience:** Clinical laboratories

### **Background:**

- This report outlines information on the recent contamination of commercial cell cultures with fungus (*Coccidioides*) which could pose a risk to laboratory workers.
- Several clinical virology laboratories in New York State have recently reported receiving tubes of Primary Rhesus Monkey Kidney Cells (RhMK) from a commercial cell supplier, Diagnostic Hybrids of Athens, Ohio, that were contaminated with fungus. The tubes were distributed nationally.
- While contamination in cell culture tubes is not an unusual event, the morphology of the fungus in at least some of the contaminated RhMK tubes is consistent with *Coccidioides*. Further, testing of material from two different lots (**A-491216-B** and **A-491206-T**) with a *Coccidioides* genus-specific real-time PCR assay has yielded positive results. Additional molecular testing will be performed to confirm and speciate for *Coccidioides immitis* and/or *Coccidioides posadasii*. Both are human pathogens.
- Tubes appeared normal on the day of arrival with no color change in the media. However, fungal growth was observed within 24 hours to a few days, in variable numbers of tubes, including those that had never been opened.

### **Steps for laboratories to take now:**

- **Laboratories should immediately stop using RhMK tubes from these implicated lots** and investigate whether there have been any potential exposures at their facility. If tubes were handled in a manner in accordance with recognized biosafety procedures, the risk of exposure to workers is currently expected to be low. A potential exposure is one where inhalation of arthroconidia may have occurred, particularly if tubes were opened or manipulated outside of a biological safety cabinet.
- Until more information is available in the next few days and in consultation with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), laboratories should safely store these tubes in an appropriate refrigerator. Tubes should be clearly labeled to avoid accidental use. If disposal of tubes is necessary due to storage space restrictions, all tubes should be autoclaved prior to disposal.
- Information about potential contamination of other lots is not presently available. As such, laboratories are strongly urged to ensure strict adherence to biosafety protocols.

## Questions and Additional Information

For laboratory related questions, please contact:

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At present, CDC does not have guidelines for responding to *Coccidioides* exposure in a laboratory as each exposure should be considered individually. If you have questions regarding possible exposures or need to report potential exposures, please contact:

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Thank you for your assistance in this investigation.