



Q&A: Skin Infections from Live or Raw Fish or Seafood Bought at Markets in Manhattan, Brooklyn and Queens Chinatowns

The New York City Health Department has identified a new outbreak of a rare skin infection. The infection affects people who handled live or raw fish or seafood bought from markets in Manhattan, Brooklyn or Queens Chinatowns.

What are the symptoms of this infection?

People who are infected develop red, tender lumps or swelling under the skin of their hands or arms. Sometimes people also develop swelling or pain in their hands or arms and have difficulty moving their fingers. If the infection is deep enough, surgery may be needed.

Who is affected by the infection?

The Health Department has identified 30 cases. All of the people interviewed say that they handled live or raw fish or seafood bought at markets in Manhattan, Brooklyn or Queens before their skin problems started.

What causes the infection?

The infection is caused by bacteria called *Mycobacterium marinum* (*M. marinum*). The bacteria can be transferred from contaminated live or raw fish or seafood into people's bodies through a break in the skin, like a cut. Some people infected with the bacteria had existing cuts on their hands when they touched contaminated live or raw fish or seafood. Others cut themselves while preparing contaminated live or raw fish or seafood (i.e., cutting a finger on a sharp crab shell or fish bone).

Can I get this infection by eating fish or seafood that carries *M. marinum* bacteria?

No.

Can this infection spread from one person to another?

No.

How is the infection treated?

Infected people need to take one or more antibiotics to treat the infection. Only a few specific antibiotics can cure this infection. Treatment should begin quickly.

Some people who were infected have been treated with traditional Chinese medicine or types of antibiotics that cannot cure the infection. If the infection isn't treated correctly, it can worsen over weeks or months and may require surgery.

How did the Health Department find out about the infections?

Doctors serving New York City's Chinese communities reported the infections to the Health Department.

What is the Health Department doing to stop the infections?

The Health Department is sharing information about the infections publicly. The Health Department has also notified the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets and the New York State Health Department.

How can I prevent this infection?

If you are handling live or raw fish or seafood, wear waterproof gloves. At a minimum, wash your hands with soap and water after you have handled live or raw fish or seafood. This is even more important if you already have cuts or other skin problems on your hands.

What should I do if I think I'm infected?

Tell a doctor you think you have an unusual skin infection (*M. marinum*) that occurs after handling fish or seafood. You can also call the Health Department's Bureau of Communicable Disease at 347-396-2600 and ask to speak with a doctor.

Examples of the skin infection caused by M. marinum:

