

**By SABRINIA GARRETT**

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A rare form of meningitis has claimed the lives of at least 11 people throughout the United States as of Tuesday, six of which were residents of Tennessee.

According to reports from the Centers for Disease Control available for public viewing on its website, the CDC was notified of the first case by the Tennessee Department of Health on Sept. 21. The case involved a patient with the onset of meningitis 19 days following an epidural steroid injected at an ambulatory surgery center in Nashville. With 39, the highest number of cases, identified in this state, locals want to know – “Am I at risk?”

Meningitis is a general term for an infection or inflammatory process involving the lining of the brain and central nervous systems, University Medical Center Director of Business Development and Marketing Anna-Lee Cockrill explained.

“According to the information provided, the form of meningitis under investigation is a result of an epidural steroid injection,” she said. “There are different types of meningitis. The cases under investigation are fungal and were obtained through contamination. These cases have no relation to the much more common forms of bacterial or viral meningitis.”

She added that the form of meningitis in question has been traced to a compounding pharmacy in Massachusetts— one that UMC does not purchase products from.

“We want to reassure our patients we do not purchase or receive any of the contaminated products from the compounding facility to which this issue has been linked,” Cockrill said, adding “We actively participate in a comprehensive response team and have preparedness plans to meet the needs of our community.”

University Medical Center Director of Emergency Services Piotr N. Galaska, MD, FAAEM,

confirmed this week that the hospital has the situation under control.

“Being prepared for an emergency and treating patients is what we do every day. Our patients and our community can rest assured we are here when they need us,” Galaska said.

UMC is part of federal and state coordinated systems including the CDC, Tennessee Department of Health (TDH) and state and local agencies. UMC’s Infection Control Coordinator Retha Parker reviews daily the communications from these agencies and monitors hospital activity.

“We follow all recommendations by the Center for Disease Control for preparedness and have informed the appropriate hospital physicians and staff of the situation,” Parker said. “The TDH and the Tennessee Poison Control Center have partnered to answer questions from the public about meningitis. The number is 1-800-222-1222.”

Tennessee is one of 10 states with reported cases of fungal meningitis. The other states are Michigan, Virginia, Florida, Indiana, Ohio, North Carolina, Minnesota, New Jersey and Maryland.

The steroid in question was sent to medical facilities in 23 states. Some 13,000 people throughout the U.S. may have received this particular steroid shot. It was reported Tuesday, also, that CDC officials believe the date of the infections began in the spring, all the way back to May.

**Staff Writer Sabrina Garrett can be contacted at [sgarrett@wilsonpost.com](mailto:sgarrett@wilsonpost.com).**