Fatally drug-resistant fungus an emerging threat

Australia is being urged to respond quickly to a new and potentially fatal fungus that is resistant to drugs and preys on people with weakened immune systems.

“Candida auris is a fungus that has been found to spread easily between patients in hospitals and patients in nursing homes. It can be hard to identify easily and early,” said Dr Marion Kainer a former Director of Healthcare Associated Infections and Antimicrobial Resistance Program at the Tennessee Department of Health until she returned to Australia in October of this year.

“Candida auris also has been identified as one of five urgent threats in a report published last week in the US. Four different strains of Candida auris have emerged around the same time across the globe.”

“In the US, Candida auris is nationally notifiable. I would recommend that Candida auris also be nationally notifiable in Australia. Early detection and aggressive containment are key to prevent its spread,” Dr Kainer says.

Dr Kainer is in Canberra sharing her experiences working in the United States, mobilising and creating evidence for controlling communicable diseases.

She is one of a number of speakers who have gathered in Canberra today for a conference organised by the Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) on controlling and preventing communicable diseases.

Other presentations will include progress reports on Australia’s readiness to map and tackle outbreaks including influenza, and the importance of partnerships in public health prevention.

Candida auris - which is carried on people’s skin - is one of a number of emerging, mysterious and dangerous fungi that have developed resistance to drugs.

Antifungals, like antibiotics, are essential treatments to combat infections in people, but rampant use of fungicides on crops is believed to be contributing to a surge in drug-resistant fungi infecting humans.

“There have been a few cases reported of Candida auris in Australia but as it is not a nationally notifiable germ, it may be under-appreciated as a threat.”

“For every clinical infection detected there may be 10-20 people who are carrying the germ,” Dr Kainer added. END

*Communicable diseases are those that spread between people.
Find the full conference program here.

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