

Report of Acupuncture-Related Infections Stirs Professional Group to Refute Information

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MedicalNewsToday.com is reporting that a recent editorial in the British Medical Journal regarding statements from University of Hong Kong microbiologists about acupuncture-related infections has triggered the ire of the National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (NCCAOM) which says it disputes that the number of reported acupuncture-related infections worldwide was "the tip of an iceberg" and that more stringent infection control measures must be taken. To read this news item, [CLICK HERE](#).

The editorial, "[Acupuncture transmitted infections](#)," which appeared in the March 18, 2010 edition, states, "A new clinical syndrome has emerged in the 21st century—acupuncture mycobacteriosis—which is mainly caused by rapidly growing mycobacteria. These mycobacteria are thought to be transmitted from the environment to patients via contaminated equipment used in acupuncture, such as cottonwool swabs, towels, hot pack covers, and boiling tanks. All mycobacterial infections associated with acupuncture so far have been characterized by localized meridian specific and acupuncture point specific lesions without dissemination. The lesions usually first appear as erythematous papules and nodules that subsequently develop into large pustules, abscesses, and ulcerative lesions after several weeks to months. Patients tended to delay seeking medical advice because of the slowly developing and relatively mild symptoms. Owing to the relatively hardy nature of mycobacteria, the long incubation period of the infection, and the difficulty in making a diagnosis, mycobacteria have caused two large outbreaks associated with acupuncture, which affected more than 70 patients." The authors, Patrick C Y Woo, Ada W C Lin, Susanna K P Lau and Kwok-Yung Yuen, continue, "The case reports and outbreaks of acupuncture transmitted infections may be the tip of the iceberg. The first reports of meticillin resistant *S aureus* (MRSA) transmitted by acupuncture appeared in 2009.² The emergence of community associated MRSA infections may aggravate the problem. To prevent infections transmitted by acupuncture, infection control measures should be implemented, such as use of disposable needles, skin disinfection procedures, and aseptic techniques. Stricter regulation and accreditation requirements are also needed. Clinicians should also have a high index of suspicion, particularly for viral and mycobacterial infections transmitted by acupuncture because of their prolonged incubation periods, and they should alert health authorities about clusters of cases."