

From the Chief Medical Officer  
Dr Michael McBride



Department of

**Health, Social Services  
and Public Safety**

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AN ROINN

**Sláinte, Seirbhísí Sóisialta  
agus Sábháilteachta Poiblí**

MÄNNYSTRIE O

**Poustie, Resydènter Heisin  
an Fowk Siccar**

**URGENT COMMUNICATION**

**HSS(MD) 27/2008**

To: Chief Executives of HSC Trusts  
Medical Directors HSC Trusts – *for onward  
transmission to: Accident and Emergency  
Departments, Intensive Care Units, Drug  
Treatment Units, Consultant Microbiologists  
and ID Physicians*  
All General Practitioners – *for onward  
transmission to Practice nurses and sessional  
doctors*  
Chief Executives of HSS Boards  
Directors of Public Health  
CCDCs  
Senior Drug and Alcohol Co-ordinators, HSS  
Boards  
Regional Epidemiologists, CDSC(NI)

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Your Ref:  
Our Ref: HSS(MD) 27/2008  
Date: 29 July 2008

Dear Colleague

**POSSIBLE CONTAMINATED HEROIN AT RISK OF CAUSING SEPSIS**

Please see the attached information from the Health Protection Agency about increased risk of clostridium infection related to contaminated Heroin. A patient information leaflet is also enclosed.

The Guidance updates advice to doctors for diagnosis, management and reporting of such cases and has been produced as part of a public health alert in response to two cases of *Clostridium novyi* infection in injecting drug users since June 2008, in Kent and Essex, with one case a fatality. A similar outbreak of severe systemic sepsis related to soft tissue inflammation occurred in injecting drug users in 2000 in different parts of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. This was responsible for a cluster of 35 deaths.

Cases of this illness are characterised by local inflammation at a subcutaneous or intramuscular injection site. Severe systemic features have usually occurred several days after development of the local lesion. There has then often been a dramatic deterioration in the patient's condition, and the condition can be fatal. Because of the rapidity with which patients can deteriorate with this condition, prompt treatment is crucial, and details are given in the guidance.

