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The Deadly Fungus - Candida Auris

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The deadly fungal infection, Candida Auris is emerging as a global threat, having spread in at least 15 countries and claimed several hundred lives.

Global Stats

- According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, there have been **587 Candida Auris cases reported in the United States**, most of them in New York, New Jersey and Illinois.
- The fungus has spread through at least 15 countries leading to deadly consequences.
- **Over the last five years**, it has hit a neonatal unit in Venezuela, swept through a hospital in Spain, forced a prestigious British Medical Centre to shut down its Intensive Care Unit (ICU) and taken root in India, Pakistan and South Africa.

Candida Auris

- It is a fungus that causes serious infections. **It was first discovered in 2009 in Japan but an analysis of the fungus revealed that it was already identified in 1996 in South Korea.**
- It can cause many different types of infections such as bloodstream infection, wound infection, ear infection etc.
- **Symptoms**
 - A person infected with this life-threatening fungus experiences symptoms like fever, sepsis, aches and fatigue.
 - It is difficult to identify symptoms because it has been seen that patients with the infection are often already sick with another illness or condition.
- **Target**
 - Candida Auris mainly affects patients who already have many medical problems or have had frequent hospital stays or live in nursing homes.
 - It is more likely to affect patients who suffer from conditions such as blood cancer or diabetes, have received lot of antibiotics or have devices like tubes going into their body.
- **Transmission**

It can spread indirectly from patient to patient in healthcare settings such as hospitals or nursing homes as it remains on people's skin and objects such as hospital furniture and equipments like glucometers, temperature probes, blood pressure cuffs, ultrasound machines and nursing carts etc. for quite a long time.
- **Concerns**
 - According to health care agencies, almost **half of the patients** who contract Candida Auris **die within 90 days.**
 - Some types of Candida Auris fungi are **resistant to the first line and second line anti-fungal medications.**
 - This fungal infection can be serious and even fatal as there is no **specific treatment for it.**
- **Precautions**
 - Family members of Patients with C Auris infection, Public health officials, laboratory staff and healthcare personnel can all help in stopping its spread.
 - Detecting and diagnosing the infection quickly is important.
 - Once the patient is diagnosed with having C Auris, the healthcare facilities should place the patient in **a separate room** as soon as possible.
 - Wounds should be bandaged to prevent any fluids from seeping out and infecting others.
 - It is also important for healthcare facilities to regularly and thoroughly **clean and disinfect affected patient's room with special cleaners known to work against fungi.**
 - Everyone entering the room should take precautions that include wearing

disposable gloves and gowns.

- Cleaning hands with hand sanitizer or soap and water before and after touching a patient with C. Auris or equipment in his/ her room.

Fungal Diseases

- Fungal diseases are caused by variety of fungi commonly found in the environment.
 - **Fungi are microorganisms that live in soil, plants and trees and even in indoor surfaces and human skin.**
 - There are millions of different species of fungi but only a fraction make people sick.
- Invasive infections rarely occur in healthy people but individuals with weak immune system are vulnerable.
- Mild fungal diseases look like a rash and are very common.
- Fungal diseases in the lungs are often similar to illness like flu or tuberculosis.
- Some other infections like fungal meningitis and bloodstream infections are less common but very deadly.
- Common fungal symptoms include skin changes including red or possibly cracking or peeling skin.

Athlete's Foot

- It is a common fungal infection that affects the foot.
- It is associated with sports and athletes because the fungus grows perfectly in warm moist environment like socks and shoes, sports equipment, locker rooms.
- It is most common in warmer climates and summer months where it can quickly multiply.
- Symptoms include redness or blisters.
- Athlete's foot is often treated with topical antifungal ointments. Severe infection can also require oral medications.

Jock Itch

- It is a common infection that is **caused by a fungus called Tinea.**
- The fungus thrives in warm moist areas of the body which means it can affect genitals, inner thighs and buttocks.
- It occurs more frequently in summer or in warm wet climates.
- It appears as a ring shaped red itchy rash and is only **mildly contagious.**
- Symptoms include itching, chafing or burning in the groin or thighs.
- Treatment involves keeping affected area clean and dry and applying topical antifungal medications.

Ringworm

- It is **caused by fungus that live on dead tissues like skin, hair and nail.**
- It causes Jock Itch and Athlete's foot.
- A red patch that may itch often turns into a raised ring-shaped patch of skin over time.
- It is highly contagious and can be transmitted by skin to skin contact or contact with pets.
- Creams and medicated ointments are often enough to treat it.
- Basic hygiene can prevent it.

Yeast Infections

- It is caused by yeast like fungi called Candida and is not contagious.
- It occurs when yeast on skin causes a red scaling itchy rash.
- It can affect any skin surface on the body but most likely to occur in warm and moist areas including armpits and the groin.
- It is especially common among the people who are obese or diabetic.
- Signs of yeast infection include rashes and patches that ooze fluid, big pimples, itching or burning.
- Treatment depends on severity of the infection.
- Avoiding yeast infection begins with a balanced diet and proper hygiene.

Fungal infections are common in humans and are usually not very serious if they are treated quickly. Taking preventive actions help avoid fungal skin infections as well. It is always best to notify a doctor at the first sight of infection to avoid complications. Emergence of multidrug resistant Candida Auris is a reminder to ensuring that no other disease/microbe gets resistant to available medications.