

A plan to address fungus

State considering options to curb organism's reach

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New York health officials are considering guidelines that would be the first in the nation aimed at preventing the spread of a multi-drug resistant fungus — *Candida auris* — that has found its way into health care institutions statewide.

Among the possibilities are tough, state-mandated guidelines that would require pre-admission laboratory tests for hospital and nursing home patients considered at high risk of carrying the fungus. Screening results would be used for triaging patients to isolation units.

The organism is problematic because it can't be easily treated in some patients. It is also an environmental problem that has led some hospitals to rip out portions of floors, walls and ceilings because the fungus has so tenaciously contaminated hospital rooms.

New York Health Commissioner Howard Zucker met a week ago in Manhattan with representatives from approximately 60 hospitals and nursing homes from throughout the state, including institutions from Long Island, seeking sug-



Illustration of the unicellular fungus (yeast) *Candida auris*.

ALAMY STOCK PHOTO / SCIENCE PHOTO LIBRARY

ABOUT CANDIDA AURIS

■ *C. auris*, as it is known, became entrenched in New York about eight years after its initial detection in Japan in 2009. Doctors there isolated the microbe from a patient who had an ear infection. However, studies in South Korea of archived biological specimens suggest *C. auris* may have been evident in that country as early as 1995. How it became the source of a New York outbreak is still a matter of debate.

■ Some scientists posit that *C. auris* spread around the world

after its discovery in Japan. Others suggest simultaneous infections that began globally, all around the same time.

■ The microbe clings to surfaces in hospital rooms, flourishes on floors, and adheres to patients' skin, phones and food trays. It is odorless and invisible.

■ *C. auris* can cause lethal bloodstream infections in people with weakened immunity, which include organ transplant recipients, anyone with cancer, HIV/AIDS or other forms of immune suppression.

SOURCES: CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION/NEWSDAY RESEARCH

gestions from health care representatives on possible mandatory pre-admission screenings, and other methods of control. The fungus has been known to have a staggeringly high mortality rate in patients considered to be among the sickest of the sick.

With New York recording more than 300 of the 613 cases reported nationwide, the state has been disproportionately affected by the organism first identified in Japan a decade ago. Since that time, the fungus has spread explosively worldwide.

"The state quite appropriately approached the 60 hospitals to say 'let's start a dialogue, so we can come up with a

plan,'" said Dr. Mark Jarrett, senior vice president and chief quality officer for Northwell Health, which has 23 hospitals in its network that spans Long Island, New York City and beyond.

Candida auris — r simply *C. auris* — is considered an emerging infectious disease by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Some infections have thwarted every approved antifungal drug. The organism has been found in hospitals statewide, including those in Nassau County. None have been reported to date in Suffolk.

Jarrett said the impetus behind screening, which could prove prohibitively expensive

for some institutions, is to isolate patients who are carriers or who have active infections. The problem, he added, is that it is difficult to run screening tests on *C. auris* because results are not rapidly available. It can take anywhere from seven to 10 days to obtain a result, Jarrett said.

"We really don't know what the prevalence of this organism is in the community," he added, referring to the general public. MRSA, for example, was once a highly infectious drug-resistant bacterium found only in hospitals. But over the course of several years, MRSA has spread into communities worldwide.

"We don't know if it's like

MRSA where in some communities 25 to 30 percent of the population has it and they're walking around with no symptoms," Jarrett said.

If *C. auris* turns out to be as prevalent as MRSA, legions of people could wind up in isolation. That's why it is important to carefully craft the guidelines, Jarrett said.

He added that most of New York's cases have occurred in patients from Brooklyn and Queens, which raises the question whether anyone from these two New York City boroughs should be automatically screened.

Zeynep Sumer King, vice president of the Greater New York Hospital Association, said guidelines are important because multi-drug-resistant organisms are a major public health concern.

"As with other drug-resistant organisms, hospitals are taking *Candida auris* very seriously, especially its detection and controlling its spread. Fortunately, not all patients who test positive for *C. auris* become sick," King said, referring to people who are colonized — carriers of the organism who do not have active infection.

"It appears to impact those who are already very ill," she added, referring to people with compromised immune systems.

The guidelines are expected to be implemented by the end of the year.

Man gets life in prison in Jayme Closs case

The Associated Press

BARRON, Wis. — A Wisconsin man was sentenced Friday to life in prison for kidnapping 13-year-old Jayme Closs and killing her parents after the girl told the judge she that wanted him "locked up forever" for trying to steal her.

Jake Patterson, 21, pleaded guilty in March to two counts of intentional homicide and one count of kidnapping. He admitted he broke into Jayme's home in October, gunned down her parents, James and Denise Closs, made off with her and held her under a bed in his remote cabin for 88 days

before she made a daring escape.

Jayme didn't appear at Patterson's sentencing hearing Friday, but a family attorney read her first public statements about her ordeal to Judge James Babler.

"He thought that he could own me but he was wrong. I was smarter," the statement said. "I was brave and he was not. ... He thought he could make me like him, but he was wrong. ... For 88 days he tried to steal me and he didn't care who he hurt or who he killed to do that. He should be locked up forever."

The judge called Patterson



Jake Patterson

AP / TYER ZHON KHA

the "embodiment of evil" before sentencing him to consecutive life sentences without the possibility of release on the homicide charges. He also ordered Patterson to serve 25

years in prison and 15 years of extended supervision on the kidnapping count.

"There's no doubt in my mind you're one of the most dangerous men to ever walk on this planet," Babler said.

Patterson sat shaking his head during most of the hearing. Offered a chance to speak, he said he would do anything to take back what he did.

"I would die," he said. "I would do absolutely anything ... to bring them back. I don't care about me. I'm just so sorry. That's all."

The judge read statements that Patterson wrote in jail in which he said he had suc-

cumbed to fantasies about keeping a young girl and torturing and controlling her. He started looking for an opportunity to kidnap someone, even deciding he might want to take multiple girls and kill multiple families, according to the statements. Jayme was the first girl he saw after these thoughts entered his mind, he said.

Patterson's attorneys, Richard Jones and Charles Glynn, told the judge that Patterson was isolated and that he overreacted to loneliness. They asked for leniency for Patterson, noting that he had pleaded guilty to spare Jayme and her family from a trial.