

Mycobacterium Marinum infection

Individuals working in close contact with marine life are in constant danger of contracting this atypical infection caused by Mycobacterium Marinum. The bacteria belong to the same family as Mycobacterium Tuberculosis. It is found mainly in sea water. The preferred temperature for its growth is around 28- 30 degree Celsius which explain its predilection to proliferate along the superficial structures in the extremities.

Fish fin injury is common in our localities, persistence swelling in the hand and wrist few weeks after injury should alert one to seek expert medical advice. Their presentations include superficial non-tender nodules, tenosynovitis, skin granuloma or ulcers and even widespread dissemination. There is no clue to which patient will have more destructive disease, although dissemination is sometimes seen in immunocompromised patients.

The swelling is due to synovitis and it spreads along the tendon sheath from the finger to the wrist. If left untreated, it may cause permanent damage to the joints and tendons. The synovitis can be mistakenly treated as rheumatism with local steroid injection which cause the infection to progress rapidly. A careful history of contact with marine life is essential to ensure a high index of suspicion and prompt treatment.

These atypical infection may require surgical debridment and drug treatment for 6 – 9 months. Residual functional deficit is sometimes observed. Preventive measures include wearing groves when handling sea products.