UK Health Security Agency

Briefing Note
Serial number **2025/025** **Date** **26/06/2025**

Event: Outbreak of *Burkholderia stabilis* ST480 suspected to be associated with non-sterile alcohol-free skin cleansing wipes - National Patient Safety Alert issued

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Authorised by:
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Contact: HCAIAMR.IOIG@ukhsa.gov.uk

IRP Level: Standard

Incident Lead: James Elston, Consultant Epidemiologist, AMR & HCAI Division

Instructions for Cascade

- UKHSA Private Office Groups who cascade within Groups
- UKHSA Regions Directorate
    - UKHSA Field Services
    - UKHSA Health Protection Teams including UKHSA Regional Deputy Directors. UKHSA regional teams are asked to cascade to their DIPC, microbiology and laboratory networks.
    - Deputy Directors in Regions Directorate
- UKHSA Lab Management Teams
- UKHSA Regional Communications
- Generic inbox for each of the devolved administrations
- DHSC CMO (excluding internal UKHSA briefing notes)
- National NHSE EPRR
- **NHS National Operations Centre** to cascade to GP practices, NHS Trusts in particular to infection prevention and control teams, clinical teams managing patients with indwelling intravascular devices e.g. haematology, oncology, infectious disease, emergency, intensive care, medical, surgical, maternity, paediatric, neonatal and radiology services, and microbiology departments. Also, for cascade to ICBs for distribution to community nursing and other relevant community services e.g. those accessing intravenous devices for outpatient parenteral antimicrobial therapy (OPAT).
- **Devolved Administrations** to cascade to Medical Directors and other DA teams as appropriate to their local arrangements
- **Regional Deputy Directors** to cascade to Directors of Public Health
- **UKHSA microbiologists** to cascade to non-UKHSA labs (NHS labs and private)
- **CPHIs / UKHSA microbiologists** to cascade to NHS Trust infection leads
- **NHS labs/NHS infection leads/NHS microbiologist/NHS infectious disease specialists** to cascade to clinical teams and managers of services. This may

include but is not limited to emergency, intensive care, medical, surgical, maternity, paediatric, neonatal and radiology services.

Summary:
UKHSA is investigating an outbreak of *Burkholderia stabilis* (ST480) which is suspected to be associated with contamination of non-sterile alcohol-free skin cleansing wipes and has issued a National Patient Safety Alert to support risk mitigation.

There are currently 48 confirmed cases and 3 probable cases of *B. stabilis* (ST480) across England, Scotland and the Republic of Ireland. *Burkholderia* species (full identification pending) has been recovered from several non-sterile, alcohol-free, skin cleansing wipe products including those used for wound care and included in first aid kits.

UKHSA has stood up a national standard incident response and is working closely with stakeholders including regulators to mitigate risks to patients and the public.
The National Patient Safety Alert is intended to reinforce safe practice concerning the use of appropriate products for intravascular access device care and care of broken skin including wounds.

Clinical laboratories are reminded to refer all new *Burkholderia cepacia* complex (Bcc) isolates to the UKHSA Antimicrobial Resistance and Healthcare Associated Infection Reference Unit for identification and sequencing.

Background and Interpretation:
B. stabilis is a species of the *Burkholderia cepacia* complex (Bcc). Bcc is widespread in the environment and can cause severe infections in some groups, including those with cystic fibrosis (CF), immunocompromised patients, and when introduced into normally sterile body sites such as blood. Bcc has been implicated in the contamination of numerous medicinal and hygiene products and associated with outbreaks particularly in healthcare settings.

UKHSA is investigating an outbreak of *B. stabilis* (ST480) potentially associated with non-sterile alcohol-free skin cleansing wipes. As of 26 June 2025, there are 43 confirmed cases and 3 probable cases in the outbreak cluster in England, 4 confirmed cases in Scotland and 1 confirmed case in the Republic of Ireland. Cases comprise individuals across a wide age range (0 – 93 years, median 44 years), 57% are female. Specimen dates are between June 2018 and April 2025. 39 (77%) case isolates were isolated from normally sterile body sites (including 67% from blood).

Information from trawling questionnaires (returned for 40 cases) indicates that cases included clinically significant infections (65% cases) and colonisations (without infection). 75% of cases had indwelling intravascular access devices or had recent insertion/removals of such devices; though cases also presented with skin and wound infections. Cases included individuals with significant co-morbid illness including 38% with malignancy and, 42% with conditions associated with immunosuppression (11/26 cases where information was available). No cases had CF. There are no known attributable deaths to date.

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Targeted product testing has been undertaken by the UKHSA food, water and environmental laboratory as part of the investigation, and *Burkholderia* species has been recovered from several non-sterile alcohol-free skin cleansing wipe products sold under different brand names. These isolates have been provisionally identified as *B. stabilis,* though confirmatory testing is underway and definitive speciation and results of whole genome sequencing is pending.

UKHSA has established a national standard incident with a multi-stakeholder incident management team including the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), regulators, NHS England and the devolved administrations, and is working closely with partners.

The National Patient Safety Alert is intended to mitigate risks to patients and public by reinforcing safe practice especially regarding intravascular access device care and care of broken skin including wounds.

Implications & Recommendations for UKHSA Regions
UKHSA regional teams are asked to be aware of this incident and to use their DIPC, microbiology and laboratory networks to share information in this briefing note for further cascade. New cases potentially linked to this outbreak should be notified to HCAIAMR.IOIG@ukhsa.gov.uk

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Implications & Recommendations for UKHSA sites and services
UKHSA Consultants in Public Health Infection (CPHI) and UKHSA microbiologists are asked to support cascade to NHS and other non-UKHSA labs, as well as NHS Trust IPC Leads. Clinical laboratories are requested to refer all new isolates of *Burkholderia cepacia complex* (Bcc) to the Antimicrobial Resistance and Healthcare Associated Infection Reference Unit (AMRHAI) for identification and sequencing.

Implications & Recommendations for NHS
Please read and follow actions specified in the National Patient Safety Alert.
Key actions stated in the National Patient Safety Alert are summarised below:

1. For intravascular access device care: ensure local guidance and practice reflects National Evidence-Based Guidelines for Preventing Healthcare-Associated Infections in NHS Hospitals in England (EPIC3). Non-sterile alcohol-free wipes are not suitable for this purpose.

2. Ensure that patients in the community with intravascular devices are aware to only use wipes if instructed to by their clinical team. These patients should only use wipes provided or recommended by their clinical team in accordance with (1). Non-sterile alcohol-free wipes are not suitable. All patients with intravascular devices need this information even if they have not been instructed to access their line. Incorporate this into local guidance, patient education and information.

3. Community healthcare providers including community pharmacy should advise patients to only use wipes marked as sterile on any broken skin including wounds. Ensure that local guidance, practice and patient information reflects NHS guidance.

4. NHS Trusts and independent sector laboratories are requested to submit any isolate from a new infection with *Burkholderia cepacia* complex, including any new isolations from cystic fibrosis patients to the UKHSA Antimicrobial Resistance and Healthcare Associated Infection Reference Unit.

NHS Trusts and independent sector laboratories are requested to submit isolates as detailed above.

NHS Trust, community health providers and independent sector clinical teams are asked to follow actions specified in the National Patient Safety Alert.

Implications and recommendations for Local Authorities
None

References/ Sources of information

- National Patient Safety Alert
- UKHSA National Patient Safety Alerts – GOV.UK
- NHS England » National infection prevention and control manual (NIPCM) for England
- WHO's (2024) 'Guidelines for the prevention of bloodstream infections and other infections associated with the use of intravascular catheters - Part 1: peripheral catheters'
- epic3: National Evidence-Based Guidelines for Preventing Healthcare-Associated Infections in NHS Hospitals in England - Journal of Hospital Infection
- Health and Social Care Act 2008: code of practice on the prevention and control of infections - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)