



## **Mycobacterium Avium Complex (MAC)**

Mycobacterium avium complex (MAC) is an infection caused by bacteria. It is like tuberculosis. MAC can affect your lungs or spread all over your body. About half of people with AIDS get MAC. People with a CD4 cell count less than 50 are at greatest risk.

### **Symptoms**

Signs include:

- A low red blood cell count (anemia)
- Chills or high fever
- Loose stool
- Feel very tired
- Stomach ache
- Weight loss

MAC can cause problems such as blood infections, hepatitis and pneumonia.

### **Causes**

MAC bacteria are common. They are found in water, soil, dust and food. Almost all people have them. A healthy immune system controls them, but they can make people with weak immune systems sick.

### **How to Know You Have MAC**

A doctor will take samples of blood, urine or spit to check for MAC. The sample will be sent to a lab where they will try to grow the bacteria. This process can take many weeks. It can be hard to find the bacteria even if a person has MAC.

If a person has a CD4 cell count less than 50, the doctor may order MAC treatment right away.

MAC infection is hard to confirm even though it is common.

### **Treatment**

Your doctor will use a combination of antibiotics to treat MAC. Long term treatment is needed to stop the return of the symptoms.

The treatment for MAC is very strong and can cause a lot of side effects. It can give you loose stool, make you sick to your stomach, and have headaches or rashes. Many mixtures of meds may have to be tried before the best is found.

Make sure your doctor knows all the meds you take and drugs you use. This must be done to prevent problems.

Sometimes the meds used to fight MAC no longer work. The body can build up resistance. Your doctor may prescribe other antibiotics to prevent this.

### **Prevention**

It is hard to avoid MAC germs since they are so common. The best way to protect yourself against the infection is to keep your immune system strong. Take your HIV medications (meds).

Certain antibiotics can help prevent MAC. You can stop the antibiotics once CD4 cell counts go over 100 for three months.

#### **For more information**

Contact your Registered Nurse Care Manager, or call PHP Nurse Advice Line at: (800) 797-1717.

