

The New York Times

October 10, 2012

As the Toll in the Meningitis Outbreak Rises

To the Editor:

Re "[Scant Oversight of Drug Maker in Fatal Outbreak](#)" (front page, Oct. 7):

The rare fungal meningitis linked to spinal steroid injections that has killed 12 people as of Wednesday morning is tragic but not surprising. The fungus *Aspergillus* is a spore-forming organism found ubiquitously in soil, water, food and air. It causes a wide range of disorders including asthma, chronic pulmonary infection and invasive disease, and millions of people globally have *Aspergillus* infections.

The usual route of infection is inhalation, but infection sometimes follows wounds, contaminated intravenous devices or injectable drugs. In the recent cases, *Aspergillus* introduced into a vulnerable part of the body coupled with steroids, which reduce immunity and promote fungus growth, was particularly deadly.

As fungi are often ignored as a source of disease, it is time to add routine molecular testing of fungal pathogens to quality control measures for pharmaceuticals so we can end unnecessary illnesses.

DAVID PERLIN

Newark, Oct. 10, 2012

The writer is executive director of the Public Health Research Institute, University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, and a founding board member of LIFE, which promotes awareness of fungal infections.