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Update: The CDC study of an unexplained dermopathy has been published in the Public Library of Science (PLoS) One. [Click here to view the full report \(http://dx.plos.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0029908\)](http://dx.plos.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0029908) <http://www.cdc.gov/Other/disclaimer.html>.

Background and Summary

Unexplained medical conditions can cause serious illness and disability among individuals, as well as demands on health care resources. In January 2008, CDC began an investigation that sought to better understand an unexplained apparent dermopathy, commonly referred to as Morgellons. CDC partnered with Kaiser Permanente (KP) - Northern California, a large group health plan in an area where many possible cases had been reported, and the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology, to begin a comprehensive clinical and laboratory study of this condition.

The investigators contacted patients among KP-Northern California enrollees who had reported symptoms that included abnormal skin sensations or sores along with the presence of fibers in the affected skin areas. Included among these patients were some who used the term Morgellons to describe their condition. The objective of the investigation was to identify any possible common cause or risk factors for the condition. Investigators also sought to objectively describe signs and symptoms of this condition, study biopsy specimens from patients' skin sores, and examine fibers or other materials reported by patients as being on or in their skin.

Results of the study, [published in PLoS One \(http://dx.plos.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0029908\)](http://dx.plos.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0029908) <http://www.cdc.gov/Other/disclaimer.html> show this condition appears to be uncommon among a population representative of Northern California residents. Skin damage from the sun was the most common skin abnormality found, and no single underlying medical condition or infectious source was identified. Upon thorough analysis, most sores appeared to result from chronic scratching and picking, without an underlying cause. The materials and fibers obtained from skin-biopsy specimens were mostly cellulose, compatible with cotton fibers.

Neuropsychological testing revealed a substantial number of study participants who scored highly in screening tests for one or more co-existing psychiatric or addictive conditions, including depression, somatic concerns (an indicator of preoccupation with health issues), and drug use.

This comprehensive study of an unexplained apparent dermopathy demonstrated no infectious cause and no evidence of an environmental link. There was no indication that it would be helpful to perform additional testing for infectious diseases as a potential cause. Future efforts should focus on helping patients reduce their symptoms through careful attention to treatment of co-existing medical, including psychiatric conditions, that might be contributing to their symptoms.

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