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RARE CONDITION SPARKS BI-NATIONAL INVESTIGATION

Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS) normally affects only about 1 in 100,000 people. So when sixteen cases recently appeared in a small geographical area along the U.S.-Mexico border, it caught the attention of health officials on both sides.

Local, state and federal health departments from San Luis Rio Colorado, Sonora, Mexico and Yuma County, Arizona, U.S. started working to confirm the diagnosis and search for the underlying cause of the disease. While both states routinely work together on a multitude of Bi-national Public Health issues, such as obesity and tuberculosis, this particular response to an emerging situation breaks new ground. This is the first time that public health officials from the U.S. and Mexico have traveled across their respective borders to conduct a joint investigation.

The first signs of GBS are muscle weakness and sometimes paralysis. It usually appears after someone has been sick with an infection, often with diarrhea. The key is to find the root cause of the infection.

“We recognize that this apparent cluster of Guillain-Barré Syndrome cases is of great concern to the community,” said Shoana Anderson, Office Chief of Infectious Disease at ADHS. “One potential cause we’ve identified is *Campylobacter* bacteria, a commonly-identified organism that can precede Guillain-Barré. While there have been more cases of *Campylobacter* this year, we have not yet positively confirmed that it is responsible for these Guillain-Barré infections.”

Health officials from Sonora have conducted outreach and education to residents in the San Luis Rio Colorado area. Arizona health officials have asked doctors and hospitals to watch for the signs of GBS and quickly contact their local health office with any possible cases.

Since GBS is not passed person to person, the best thing for people to do is to prevent infections in the first place. Good hand-washing habits and safe food preparation go a long way to prevent common illnesses. Everyone should wash their hands thoroughly after using the bathroom, before and while they are cooking, and before eating.

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