

Woman Injects 'Bath Salts,' Loses Arm To Flesh-Eating Bacteria

03:46 pm

January 13, 2012

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Rogelio V. Solis/AP

Stimulant chemicals dubbed "bath salts" are increasingly injected for a high.

Using illicit drugs can cause lots of bad things to happen. But being attacked by flesh-eating bacteria usually isn't one of them.

Yet that's what happened to an unfortunate young woman who had injected the increasingly popular stimulant drug called "bath salts."

The 34-year-old woman showed up at a New Orleans hospital with a painful, swollen arm after she attended a party. She had a small red puncture mark on her forearm.

The doctors diagnosed a skin infection and put her on intravenous antibiotics. Things got better. But two days later, the swelling suddenly returned. At that point, she told them that she had injected the bath salts (not to be confused with real bathing aids) at the party.

The doctors cut open the skin on the woman's forearm and discovered a raging infection and dead muscle. They knew immediately that she was in serious trouble. As they cut skin farther up her arm in an effort to find healthy tissue, the infection was moving so fast they could see flesh dying right before their eyes.

In the end, doctors amputated the woman's entire right arm and shoulder to stop the infection, and also performed a radical mastectomy and skin grafts. The woman survived, and is now in rehabilitation. Her case was [reported](#) online in the journal *Orthopedics*.

This tale certainly got *Shots'* attention. Bath salts is a relatively new problem in the world of recreational drugs. The name covers several [synthetic chemicals](#), including mephedrone and MDPV, short for methylenedioxypyrovalerone, that give a stimulant high similar to meth or cocaine. The stuff is sold under names like Vanilla Sky or Ivory Wave.

The Drug Enforcement Administration invoked emergency powers in October to [make the drug illegal](#).

Until recently most people who have taken bath salts have either snorted or smoked the drug. But injection gives a quicker, stronger high, so drug abuse experts aren't surprised to see some people going that route.

This appears to be the first known case of a person contracting a flesh-eating infection from shooting up bath salts.

Infections with flesh-eating bacteria are rare, fortunately. But there's a risk of infection with any sort of injection, even in a hospital. And as Robert Russo, an orthopedic resident who helped treat the woman, tells *Shots*: "When you're out in the street with these drugs the risk is significantly higher."

Russo had gotten used to treating gunshot wounds in the ER, but was still shaken by this case. "It's one of those horrible things that starts out as no big deal," he says. "Then the person ends up losing an extremity."

Bath salts is a bad drug, Russo adds. This woman's nightmarish experience "is just one more reason to stay away from it."

http://www.npr.org/blogs/health/2012/01/13/145179057/woman-injects-bath-salts-loses-arm-to-flesh-eating-bacteria?ps=sh_topprev