

A Deadly Tooth Infection

Young father of two dies of a tooth infection. Yes, it can happen today.

A recent news article told the story of a 26-year-old man who was a long-haul truck driver and a father of 2. He died suddenly of an infection that spread to his lungs which began with an infected tooth.

Two weeks prior, he had a toothache while en route on a trip from California to New York. He stopped in Oklahoma to see a dentist who cleaned out the infection and placed him on antibiotics. He continued driving and felt better but when he arrived in New York, the pain returned and his face became swollen. His brother decided to drive him back to California but when his condition worsened, they stopped at a hospital in Utah where doctors found that the infection had spread to his lungs and throughout his body. The infection was resistant to antibiotics. He died a short time after at the age of 26. The only medical condition he had was diabetes which was well-controlled.

This is onerous because it is rare; since the advent of antibiotics, there have been few deaths from dental infections. But the concern is that in an age where antibiotics have been used so extensively, bacteria are developing resistance as they mutate into organisms that at this time we cannot kill with antibiotics. Drug-resistant infections are becoming a significant cause of death in hospitals and elsewhere amounting to over 25,000 Americans per year who succumb to infections that heretofore were manageable with antibiotics.

As an aside, the FDA should be in overdrive by whatever means possible to encourage and subsidize drug companies to develop a new generation of antibiotics because this problem will not go away and will only worsen.

I have seen a number of patients over the last number of years who had chronic infections particularly around root-canal treated teeth where infection was not resolved; the infections went from being chronic to being very acute.

This is another reason why you should be careful about ignoring dental infections or ignoring the recommended treatment of dental infections.

Yours truly,
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