Stem cell shots linked to bacterial infection outbreak

Five different germs were seen in the patients, including one type of *E. coli*

ASSOCIATED PRESS
NEW YORK

U.S. health officials have reported an outbreak of bacterial infections in people who got injections of stem cells derived from umbilical cord blood.

At least 12 patients in Florida, Texas and Arizona became infected after getting injections for problems like joint and back pain, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said. All 12 were hospitalised, three of them for a month or longer. None died.

Investigators don’t think the contamination occurred at the clinics where the shots were given, because they found bacteria in unopened vials provided by the distributor, Yorba Linda, California-based Liveyon.

Liveyon voluntarily recalled the stem cells in October.

Last month, the Food and Drug Administration sent a warning to Genetech Inc., the small San Diego company that processed the stem cells. The FDA said the company should not be marketing the stem cells without regulators’ approval and has deviated from manufacturing requirements in ways that could have led to bacterial contamination.

Stem cells are very young cells than can develop into specialised cells, like blood cells. The cells are being studied as a potential way to treat many diseases.

Stem cells can be harvested from adults, but another source is umbilical cord blood. Officials say stems cells from cord blood also are being sold to doctors to treat patients for conditions like pain in their joints, shoulders or back.

Last year, the FDA announced plans to crack down on doctors and businesses promoting stem cell injections for diseases ranging from arthritis to Alzheimer’s disease. The CDC reported that stem cells from cord blood were the source of bacterial infections. Five different germs were seen in the patients, including one type of *E. coli.*