

**NONTUBERCULOUS MYCOBACTERIA IN SLOVENIA IN 2000 TO 2006 –
A NATION-WIDE STUDY**

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Nontuberculous mycobacteria (NTM) are ubiquitous bacteria capable of infecting and causing disease in both immunocompetent and immunocompromised hosts. The frequency of nontuberculous mycobacterial diseases differs with regard to different geographical regions of the world. In general, cases of mycobacteriosis are on the rise in the last years. The aim of this study is to analyze laboratory diagnostics of NTM and nontuberculous mycobacterial disease in the last seven years (2000-2006) and to detect eventual changes in distribution of NTM in Slovenia.

Between 2000 and 2006 there were 6 laboratories in Slovenia that were performing laboratory diagnostics of tuberculosis and NTM in humans. In all laboratories, cultures were grown on solid and liquid media. All clinical isolates of mycobacteria were sent for identification to the National Reference Laboratory for Mycobacteria Golnik. GenoType Mycobacteria CM/AS assays (Hain Life Sciences, Nehren, Germany), AccuProbe tests (GenProbe, San Diego, USA), classical biochemical tests and/or colony morphology of NTM on transparent medium were used for identification of mycobacteria.

A total of 1299 isolates of NTM (1.28%) were isolated from 101,224 clinical specimens. *Mycobacterium* (*M.*) *xenopi* (28.79%) was the most frequently isolated species followed by *M. avium* complex (20.25%), *M. gordonae* (16.55%), *M. kansasii* (7.62%) and *M. fortuitum* (6.62%). In contrast, *M. kansasii* and *M. avium* complex organisms were found to be the most common disease - causing mycobacteria in our country in the last 7 years. Diseases caused by NTM have been observed in a total of 60 persons in the same period.

Currently, nontuberculous mycobacterial diseases are relatively rare in Slovenia. However, the situation could change in the near future. At least two reasons support this thought: firstly, the incidence of tuberculosis is decreasing each year and secondly, non-selective BCG vaccination was stopped in 2005 in our country.