

Iranian asylum seeker Hamid Kehazaei died from rare bacterial infection from Manus Island: report

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Iranian asylum seeker Hamid Kehazaei is reported to have died on Manus Island from a rare bacterial infection that has a high mortality rate.

The 24-year-old died in Brisbane's Mater hospital last month after first being transferred to Port Moresby. A worker on the island told Fairfax Media Mr Kehazaei died from severe septicemia after having been kept for a week on the island by the International Health and Medical Service after cutting his foot.

The ABC's *Lateline* program on Friday reported the infection was caused by a bacteria called *Chromobacterium violaceum* that aggressively attacked internal organs when it entered the bloodstream.

The bacteria was found in tropical and subtropical climates in soil and stagnant water mostly during summer, and cases of infection had been reported in Australia, south-east Asia, India, Argentina and south-east United States.



Hamid Kehazaei was evacuated to the mainland.
Photo: Supplied

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It was discovered in the 1920s and less than 200 cases had been reported. The mortality rate was believed to be between 60 to 80 per cent but early diagnosis was thought to help the chances of recovery and the use of specific antibiotic treatment.

A man who said he was a former Manus Island detainee, Ali Mesbahi, told the ABC they were told to be vigilant about covering up cuts to prevent infections but doctors were not able to assess Mr Kehazaei's condition because they were booked out.

It was only after security officers were alerted to his worsening condition that he was placed in medical isolation, Mr Mesbahi said.

"He said that I think that something cut my leg and something like infection," Mr Mesbahi told the ABC.

Leaked documents, obtained by Fairfax Media and reported at the time of Mr Kehazaei's death, revealed a pattern of medical negligence on the island, including untreated skin infections, tooth decay and tropical diseases.

One asylum seeker said an IHMS staff member said there was nothing more they could do for Mr Kehazaei once he was brought to the IHMS clinic. In a letter to IHMS, the asylum seeker said Mr Kehazaei's leg was swollen with pus and he couldn't walk. He also appeared yellow and was lying on the ground in the compound before being taken to the clinic. Mr Kehazaei, then in a wheelchair, told his friend he was concerned his leg would have to be amputated.

It had been previously alleged Mr Kehazaei was brain dead by the time he reached Brisbane's Mater hospital after suffering five cardiac arrests in Port Moresby. A week later, Immigration Minister Scott Morrison announced he had died.

Mr Morrison said the government would wait until the coroner's report before issuing a statement about Mr Kehazaei's death.

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