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Lawsuit filed over hospitalization after prison dentistry. Christina Bergstrom was in intensive care after delayed treatment of potentially fatal infection

BOISE — A woman who says she suffered a life-threatening infection after Idaho's prison staffers denied her antibiotics following dental surgery is suing state officials and Corizon Health, claiming she was subjected to cruel and unusual punishment. Christina Bergstrom says she was hospitalized for two weeks — part of that time in intensive care — after she developed a rare, rapidly spreading and potentially fatal infection after her wisdom teeth were removed. She's asking a federal judge to order Corizon to pay her an unspecified amount of damages. Officials with Corizon Health did not immediately respond to a request for comment on Wednesday. Idaho Department of Correction spokesman Jeff Ray said the department doesn't comment on pending litigation. According to the lawsuit filed in U.S. District Court, Bergstrom was told shortly after she arrived at the Pocatello Women's Correctional Center in 2018 that she needed to have her wisdom teeth removed. The surgery was done about two months later. Two were extracted normally, but the third broke into pieces during the process, according to the lawsuit. Bergstrom said she was given acetaminophen but no antibiotics following the surgery. Two days later, she said her mouth started swelling and bleeding and she could "taste the infection," where the tooth was removed. Though she said she was in extreme pain and couldn't sleep or eat, she said prison staffers denied her pain medication and antibiotics, at one point telling her that they thought she just wanted drugs. Over the next several hours she said the swelling continued, her skin became hot and red to the touch and she developed a fever and a rapid pulse. Her face became so deformed by the swelling she could barely pronounce words, according to the lawsuit. Still, Bergstrom said, prison staffers denied her requests for medication. Four days after her wisdom teeth were removed, Bergstrom contends, she was having trouble breathing because of the swelling in her throat. That's when she was taken to the prison's medical center and then to the regional hospital, where she had to undergo emergency surgery and spend three days unconscious in the intensive care unit. Doctors diagnosed her with Ludwig's Angina, a rare, rapidly spreading infection of the tissue in the mouth and neck that can quickly kill if left untreated. After six days in the hospital, doctors had her flown to a larger medical center in Salt Lake City for additional treatment, according to the lawsuit. "The infection was too deep to be treated with antibiotics due to the delay in providing treatment," Bergstrom's attorney Howard Belodoff, wrote in the lawsuit. She had another surgery and was hospitalized for several more days, kept in shackles and accompanied by a correctional officer throughout her stay. Bergstrom arrived in prison in April of 2018, ordered to serve at least two years on drug charges. She was released earlier this year. She's since been released from prison but still suffers complications from the ordeal, including a large scar on her neck, numbness and swelling on her face and pain when she turns her head, according to the lawsuit. Bergstrom also contends that other inmates have also had infections, swelling and pain after prison health care providers pulled their teeth, and also were denied adequate medical care. Corizon has not yet filed a formal response to the lawsuit.