

PATIENT INFORMATION

ESBLs

Extended Spectrum Beta-Lactamases

What is an ESBL?

ESBL stands for Extended Spectrum Beta-Lactamase. This is an enzyme produced by some bacteria which can break down certain types of antibiotics.

ESBL can be produced by bacteria that normally live in the bowel, for example E. coli. These bacteria may also cause infections in the urine, wounds, lungs or bloodstream.

This resistance can make some infections more difficult to treat because some antibiotics may not work.

How might ESBL affect me?

You can carry ESBL-producing bacteria without feeling unwell. The bacteria usually live harmlessly in the bowel; this is called colonisation and does not usually need treatment. Sometimes the bacteria can cause an infection, for example in the urine, a wound, the lungs or bloodstream. If this happens, your doctor will decide whether antibiotic treatment is needed.

How is it spread?

ESBL-producing bacteria can spread from person to person on unwashed hands, or through contact with contaminated surfaces, toilets, equipment or body fluids. The risk of spread is greater when someone has diarrhoea or when wounds or medical devices are present. Good hand hygiene is the most important way to reduce spread.

Can I spread it to other people?

People in hospital can be more vulnerable to infection because illness, surgery, medicines and procedures may weaken the body's natural defences.

While you are in hospital, you may be cared for in a single room and may have your own toilet or commode, depending on an individual risk assessment. Staff will explain any precautions needed.

Good hand hygiene by staff, patients and visitors is the main way to help prevent the bacteria spreading. Staff may also wear gloves and aprons when caring for you.

Visitors can usually continue to visit as normal but should clean their hands when entering and leaving your room or ward area.

What can I do to help?

- Wash your hands after using the toilet.
- Wash your hands before preparing or eating food.
- Avoid touching wounds, catheters, drips or other medical devices.
- Remind staff to clean their hands before providing direct care if you are unsure whether they have done so.
- Tell staff promptly if you develop diarrhoea.
- Do not share personal items such as towels, washcloths or toiletries while in hospital.

Is this the type of E. coli that causes food poisoning?

No. ESBL-producing E. coli is more commonly associated with urinary infections and other healthcare-related infections rather than food poisoning.

How can ESBL be treated?

Treatment options are still available if you develop an infection. If antibiotic treatment is needed, your doctor will discuss this with you and choose an antibiotic based on laboratory results.

Will I have to stay in hospital until the ESBL has cleared?

No. You do not need to stay in hospital because you are carrying ESBL-producing bacteria. You will be able to go home when your condition allows.

What happens when I go home?

The risk of spreading ESBL-producing bacteria to family and friends at home is low. Normal personal hygiene and routine household cleaning are usually sufficient, and restrictions on visitors or everyday activities are not normally needed.

Helping to prevent antibiotic resistance

It is important that antibiotics are prescribed only when needed, in the correct dose and for the correct duration.

Using antibiotics only when they are needed, at the correct dose and for the correct length of time, helps reduce antibiotic resistance. If you are prescribed antibiotics, take them exactly as directed and ask your healthcare professional if you have any concerns.

Future healthcare appointments

Please tell healthcare staff if you have previously had ESBL, especially if you are admitted to hospital, attend a clinic, have surgery or are prescribed antibiotics.

If you require further advice after reading this leaflet, or need this information in a different format, please contact the Infection Prevention and Control Team on (01803) 655757 and ask to speak to an Infection Prevention and Control nurse.

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