University Hospitals Dorset
NHS Foundation Trust

ESBL (Extended Spectrum Beta Lactamase)

Infection Prevention and Control Team

Information for patients and their relatives or carers

Good hand hygiene helps prevent infection. Please wash or gel your hands when entering or leaving this hospital.



What is ESBL?

ESBL stands for (Extended Spectrum Beta Lactamase). ESBL does not refer to one specific organism. It is an enzyme (chemical) produced by some bacteria, which breaks down certain types of antibiotics, with the result that the antibiotic does not treat the infection caused by the bacteria.

Am I at risk of getting ESBL?

Most infections have occurred in people with other underlying medical conditions who are already sick, and in elderly people.

Other factors are :

- prolonged stay in hospital
- taking repeated courses of antibiotics
- a stay in a nursing or residential home
- having a urinary catheter

Can ESBL be treated?

People with ESBL may not need any treatment at all. For those with ESBL infections, a doctor will advise on specialised antibiotics to treat the infection.

How can the spread of ESBLs be prevented?

Precautions are simple to apply and must be done by both individuals with ESBL and the people caring for them.

- Maintain high standards of environmental cleanliness
- Strict attention to hand hygiene by cleansing hands with soap and water
- Alcohol hand rub if soap and water not available
- Wear protective clothing when in contact with infected material
- Laundering of personal items should be washed separately at a temperature of 60 degrees.

How is ESBL spread?

There is some evidence that they can be found in the faeces of farm animals as well as humans. This means that it is possible that contamination of food, e.g. raw meat may lead to infections in humans. It is also possible that bacteria is passed from person to person on contaminated hands, or by poor practice in urinary catheter care.

How might ESBL affect me?

Infection from ESBL producing bacteria occurs mainly in the urine, but may also affect wounds the lungs and blood.

These bacteria can be in your body (usually your gut) but do not make you feel unwell. They can be present in both healthy and sick people. A bacteria, which has acquired the genes to produce an ESBL is resistant to certain antibiotics.

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