

Extended Spectrum Beta Lactamase Producing Bacteria (ESBLs)

Fact Sheet for Patient, Resident, Family and Visitors

One of the test results shows you or your family member has a germ or bacteria called Extended Spectrum Beta Lactamase or ESBL.

What is Extended Spectrum Beta Lactamase (ESBL)?

Extended Spectrum Beta Lactamase (ESBLs) are enzymes produced by some bacteria or germs that can make them resistant to certain antibiotics. These bacteria or germs can be found in many parts of your body but are normally in your bowel.

What does antibiotic resistance mean?

Antibiotics are drugs used to treat infections caused by germs. Sometimes these drugs will no longer kill the germs and these germs are called antibiotic resistant.

How does a person get an ESBL?

ESBL can be present in patients in the hospital and residents in personal care homes. This bacteria can be spread by not washing their hands, especially after using the bathroom, can spread these bacteria. The spread of ESBL in a hospital can occur most commonly through contact with another person that has an ESBL, or on the hands of health care workers.

Who Gets an ESBL?

Anyone can get an ESBL. Patients in hospitals who have open wounds, catheters, or drainage tubes and those who are very ill are most likely to get an ESBL. Residents in personal care homes are at a lower risk for ESBLs but a long stay in hospital, receiving a lot of antibiotics or contact with an individual or equipment that has ESBL might increase their risk of ESBL. The general public living in the community are at low risk of getting an ESBL, so there is generally no need for special precautions in the home.

Why are special precautions needed?

It is important that special precautions are taken during a hospital stay and may be taken with a resident in a personal care home to stop the germ from spreading to other patients/residents.

What are the special precautions?

Some of the precautions may include:

- Having the patient/resident remain in a private room.
- A sign placed on the door of the room to alert everyone of the precautions needed.
- Everyone must wash their hands or use alcohol-based handrub (sanitizer) when leaving the room.
- If the patient/resident has to leave their room, their hands must be washed well or an alcohol-based handrub (sanitizer) used as well as skin wounds covered.
- If a patient is in the hospital they may not be able to go to other areas of the hospital or cafeteria.
- Residents may be allowed to go to other areas of the personal care home, e.g. to participate in activities.

What about family and visitors?

Family and friends can visit but they will be told to wash their hands or use an alcohol-based handrub (sanitizer) before leaving the room. Visitors may still have close contact such as hugging, kissing and hand holding. Family members rarely get an ESBL. If they do, it does not usually cause a problem. Patients with an ESBL do not pose a risk to their families or to other healthy people.

What about at home?

There are no special precautions at home except people should wash their hands often. Hands should be washed after going to the bathroom, or touching their wound. This is always good to do to prevent the spread of germs and not just because someone has ESBL.

How can the person with ESBL help?

- Remind all staff and visitors to wash their hands or use an alcohol-based handrub (sanitizer) before and after they touch the ESBL positive individual or are in the room.

- The person who has an ESBL should wash their hands well or use an alcohol-based handrub (sanitizer) often. When washing their hands, turn off the taps with a paper towel to avoid getting hands dirty again.
- If another doctor, hospital, clinic is visited or they receive home care, it is important to tell staff that they have an ESBL.

Good handwashing or using alcohol-based handrub (sanitizer) is the best way to prevent the spread of these germs.