



A lifetime of specialist care

## Extended-spectrum beta-lactamases (ESBLs)

Information for patients, carers, relatives and visitors

### What is an extended-spectrum beta-lactamase (ESBL)?

Extended-spectrum beta-lactamases (ESBL) are enzymes produced by bacteria. ESBL producing bacteria are usually found in the bowel, where they can survive harmlessly without causing an infection.

Sometimes the bacteria can cause an infection, for example if they get into the blood stream or contaminate a wound. Bacteria that produce ESBLs are resistant to many antibiotics.

A person who carries ESBL producing bacteria is said to be colonised. If you are colonised, it means the bacteria can be found on your skin and in some other areas of your body, but they are not causing an infection.

### Who is at risk of getting an ESBL producing bacteria?

Anyone can be colonised by an ESBL producing bacteria, but you have a higher risk if you:

- are ill, or are in hospital with open wounds, urinary catheters or drainage tubes
- are receiving, or have had a lot of, antibiotics - especially if the course of antibiotics has not been completed for the prescribed period of time
- have had contact with someone who has an ESBL producing bacteria.

### How ESBL producing bacteria are spread

ESBL producing bacteria can be spread from person to person, on the hands of patients and healthcare workers. The risk of spreading the bacteria is higher if you have diarrhoea or a urinary catheter, because ESBL producing bacteria are often found in the bowel.

### Controlling the spread of ESBL producing bacteria

It is important that precautions are taken to stop ESBLs spreading. Effective control measures include:

- **Hand hygiene:** wash your hands regularly, especially before eating and after using the toilet. Wash your hands with soap and water, or use an alcohol hand rub.

- **Family and visitors:** your family and visitors should wash their hands before visiting, and when leaving the hospital, especially if they have provided personal care. They can wash their hands with soap and water, or use the alcohol hand rub.
- **Healthcare workers:** your care team should wear disposable plastic aprons and disposable gloves, and wash their hands or use the alcohol hand rub.

## Treating ESBL infections and colonisation

Sometimes infections need to be treated with antibiotics. Your doctor will only prescribe antibiotics if they are necessary, and he/she will discuss this with you.

If you are found to be carrying the ESBL producing bacteria without having an infection, you do not need treatment. Most people find their bodies clear ESBLs over time without treatment.

Patients who have an infection or are colonised with an ESBL producing bacteria may be nursed in a single side room or cubicle. We will regularly review your care and isolation precautions.

## Going home

When you (or your child, if they are the patient) go home you do not need to take any special precautions, and your family are not at risk. Usually, the ESBL producing bacteria will clear on their own, without treatment.

Your consultant will inform your GP that you have had an infection, or are colonised with an ESBL producing bacterium.

## What is Royal Brompton & Harefield Trust doing about ESBLs?

We take infection prevention and control very seriously and have guidelines and procedures in place to reduce the risks of spreading infection. Our staff work extremely hard to ensure that infections are reduced, and risk to patients is minimised.

If you have any questions, please talk to your hospital doctor or nurse. You can also contact a member of the infection prevention and control team on 020 7351 8444/84.

If you have any concerns about your care and treatment, please contact the patient advice and liaison service (PALS) by email [pals@rbht.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@rbht.nhs.uk), or phone:

Royal Brompton Hospital: 020 7349 7715

Harefield Hospital: 01895 826 572