

Antibiotic Resistant Coliforms Including Extended Spectrum Beta-Lactamase (ESBL) producing coliforms

An information leaflet for patients and relatives

What are antibiotic resistant coliforms?

Coliforms are bacteria (germs/bugs), such as E. coli, which live harmlessly in the bowel in all people. Occasionally they can cause infections, such as a urine infection. Most coliform infections can be easily treated with antibiotics, but some strains have become resistant to antibiotics. Both antibiotic resistant and sensitive bacteria cause the same types of infection.

One way in which bacteria develop resistance to antibiotics is by producing enzymes which can destroy antibiotics. An example of this is the Extended Spectrum Beta-Lactamase (ESBL) enzyme, which breaks down many of our commonly used antibiotics.

Treating infection caused by these bacteria can be more difficult, because there are fewer effective antibiotics to use.

How are they spread?

Coliforms can be passed from person to person. In the healthcare setting this is usually on the hands of a healthcare worker or possibly on contaminated equipment, that is used for more than one patient, for example bedpans or commodes which have not been cleaned and disinfected properly.

To reduce this risk, bedpans are disposable and single use only.

Commodes are cleaned/disinfected with special disinfectant wipes that kill any bacteria. Some equipment is dedicated to one patient only and then thrown away after use

How can you tell if someone has an antibiotic resistant coliform infection?

There are no specific signs and symptoms. The only way to tell if someone has an antibiotic resistant coliform infection is to grow the bacteria from a sample of urine, fluid or swab in a laboratory.

How will antibiotic resistant coliforms affect me?

People can carry antibiotic resistant coliforms at body sites other than their bowel without any ill effects and with no active infection being present. This is called 'colonisation'. In most cases no antibiotic treatment is necessary for colonisation. It is only if infection develops that treatment is required.

What happens whilst I am in hospice?

All hospice rooms are single rooms, which will reduce the risk of the coliform bacteria being passed to other patients. Please do not walk freely around the ward, instead limit your movement to your bed space/room. This is to protect other vulnerable patients on the ward.

Please remember to wash your hands with soap and water, after using the toilet and before eating and drinking.

Staff will wear disposable gloves and plastic aprons when caring directly for you, and will wash their hands using soap and water or using alcohol hand rub.

It is helpful to keep your locker and bed-side table tidy and clutter-free, to allow all surfaces to be cleaned thoroughly.

Can I have visitors whilst I'm in the hospice?

Yes, you can have visitors, as healthy people are at very little risk of developing infection from antibiotic resistant coliforms, the same as for any bacteria.

Visitors should clean their hands when entering and before leaving the ward using the alcohol hand rub or the nearest hand wash basin.

Visitors do not need to routinely wear gloves or aprons, but are needed if they are helping with your personal hygiene/care.

Visitors should sit on visitors' chairs and not on patient beds.

Can I go home with an antibiotic resistant coliform/ESBL producing coliform?

Yes. Your doctor will assess you and discharge you from hospital when you are fit enough to go home.

Antibiotic resistant coliforms/ESBL coliforms are not a risk to healthy people, the same as for any bacteria.

Are any special precautions necessary once I'm back home?

You can carry on with life as normal.

Please use good personal hygiene.

If you have a urinary catheter, this should be emptied in the normal way, taking care not to splash and to wash your hands before and after emptying the catheter bag.

Clothing/bed-linen can be washed as normal, unless there is urine or faeces on them, in which case wash separately on the hottest wash cycle suitable for the clothing/bed-linen.

(Text adapted from the Antibiotic Resistant Coliforms leaflet from the Department of Infection Prevention and Control)