



Winnipeg Regional
Health Authority
Caring for Health

Office régional de la
santé de Winnipeg
À l'écoute de notre santé

ESBL: Frequently Asked Questions for Patients and Families

Colonization: refers to germs/bacteria present on or in a person's body without causing illness. Everybody is colonized with many different kinds of bugs/bacteria and usually do not become ill from them

Infection: is when a person becomes ill from specific bugs/bacteria

Surveillance/Tracking: close watch kept over something

Extended Spectrum Beta-Lactamase (ESBL): An enzyme produced by some types of bacteria which can cause certain antibiotics not to work

What is ESBL?

Our bodies are colonized by many different types of bacteria at all times, only some of which can be harmful to us. ESBL producing bacteria are a certain group of bugs that produce the enzyme ESBL, making some antibiotics ineffective. Most people's immune system is able to fight an infection caused by an ESBL producing bacteria.

How have we been approaching ESBL positive patients up until now?

In the past, the WRHA flagged those patients who became ESBL positive. If positive, patients were placed on Contact Precautions for the duration of their stay. Those providing direct care (visitors or staff) were required to wear gowns and gloves in the room. In some facilities these precautions were modified.

Since your last visit, we have implemented a change in our practices relating to ESBL. We are no longer isolating patients with ESBL.

Why is the WRHA changing these procedures?

National evidence gathered shows, while ESBL-producing bacteria can live in the health care environment, there have been very few outbreaks caused by ESBL.

When ESBL positive bacteria were first discovered, there was a fear it might cause massive outbreaks in health care facilities. Fortunately, we now know this is not the case.

We also know patients in isolation are more likely to get depressed, are visited less often by healthcare providers, and are more likely to experience medical errors.



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When we balance all of these factors together, we feel it is better for our patients that we change our current practices and treat ESBL-producing bacteria like other bacteria. This will allow us to focus our efforts on more dangerous bacteria.

Will this change put patients at risk?

No. We will continue to work on excellent infection prevention and control standards for all patients. We will continue to treat ESBL infections quickly and appropriately. If we see concerning trends of increased infections or evidence of an outbreak occurring then we will take quick and appropriate action.

So I won't need to be isolated during my hospital stay?

No. There is no need for isolation because the risks are so low. If everyone visiting you clean their hands with soap and water or use alcohol based hand rub (sanitizer) before entering and leaving the room; and with the infection control standards of our hospitals, there should be enough protection for you, other patients, healthcare providers, and visitors.

Can I be treated for ESBL?

Yes; if you develop an infection with ESBL-producing bacteria there are antibiotics available to treat the infection.

Am I more likely to get ESBL as a patient?

It is very unlikely you will get a harmful infection from ESBL.