

ESBL

What is ESBL? ESBL stands for “extended spectrum beta lactamase”. This is a property that various types of bacteria may acquire, resulting in their being resistant to many types of antibiotic. The reason this occurs is because of frequent, excessive use of antibiotics in our society, together with the fact that people travel more widely now and bring new bacteria home with them.

This ESBL property has been identified in bacteria that you have as part of your gut flora. These gut bacteria will not make you sick, but you are now a carrier of bacteria of ESBL. Carriers of ESBL cannot be treated, and the condition is lifelong.

Why does this concern us? When carriers of ESBL are treated in hospital, bacteria with ESBL can spread within the hospital and infect other patients. In-hospital spread of ESBL can result in more antibiotic-resistant infections, e.g. urinary tract infections or wound infections. Hospital inpatients may also develop other serious infections, which are difficult to treat with antibiotics.

Always state that you are a carrier of ESBL when you:

- ☞ have a GP appointment
- ☞ are referred to the hospital
- ☞ attend a scheduled hospital appointment
- ☞ are admitted to the hospital

Then, the hospital can undertake measures to ensure that you receive the treatment you need, and at the same time, that you do not spread infection in the hospital.

At home, you can prevent spread of ESBL by normal, good hand hygiene. This means washing your hands thoroughly after visiting the toilet, and before preparing food. Otherwise, you can live a completely normal life with your family. There is no reason to worry about yourself or your family members, if you are a carrier of ESBL. However, it remains important that you remember to notify this in any contact with the health service.