

Extended spectrum beta-lactamase (ESBL)

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Extended Spectrum Beta-Lactamase (ESBL) is an enzyme produced by certain bacteria which can destroy some antibiotics (e.g. penicillins and cephalosporins) rendering them ineffective. Therefore, infections involving ESBL-producing bacteria may be difficult to treat.



The bacteria that produce ESBL live in the bowel of both healthy and sick people.

When ESBL travels to other parts of your body it may cause localised infections, often in urine, but sometimes in wounds or in blood. It is possible for ESBL to live in your body without causing infection; this is called colonisation. People who carry ESBL do not look or feel different from anyone else and may not have any symptoms.



ESBL is spread on the hands after contact with a person carrying ESBL bacteria, or contaminated equipment, if the hands are not cleaned properly.

Elderly people, over 65 years old

Very young, premature neonates

People with long term urinary catheters

People taking prolonged and extensive antibiotic therapy

People being treated for cancer

