

Infection Control Department

Acinetobacter

Information for patients and visitors

What is *Acinetobacter*?

Acinetobacter is a type of bacterium which is widely distributed in nature, including the hospital environment. It can also be found on the skin of healthy people, who carry it harmlessly.

How do you acquire *Acinetobacter*?

Acinetobacter can live on the skin and may survive the environment for long periods. You can acquire *Acinetobacter* from the environment or by contact with others who are carrying it.

What is meant by *Acinetobacter* carrier?

People who have *Acinetobacter* on their skin or in their throat, but who are unharmed by it, are described as being '**colonised**' or '**carriers**'. The germ lives completely harmlessly on them and they will not even know they have it unless they have been tested.

So how can you tell if a person is an *Acinetobacter* carrier?

Acinetobacter carriers do not look or feel different from other people. The only way to know if you are an *Acinetobacter* carrier is to do a laboratory test on swabs from your throat, skin or wound.

What infections can *Acinetobacter* cause?

Occasionally *Acinetobacter* can cause infections in people who are ill in hospital. The most common *Acinetobacter* infections include pneumonia, bacteraemia (blood stream infection), wound infections and urinary tract infections. The symptoms of infection will depend on where the infection is.

Hospital strains of *Acinetobacter* can be resistant to antibiotics which makes them difficult to treat as stronger antibiotics are needed.

Who is at risk of infection?

Hospitalised patients, especially very ill patients are at a greater risk of infection. Such patients are also more likely to be affected if, in addition, they suffer from chronic lung disease, weakened immune systems or diabetes.

How can *Acinetobacter* be controlled and prevented from spreading in hospitals?

Spread can be reduced by careful attention to infection control procedures such as hand hygiene and environmental cleaning.

Patients who test positive for *Acinetobacter* may be placed in a single room. This means that they are cared for apart from other patients, although they continue to receive the same high standard of care. A sign placed on the door alerts everyone to what precautions are needed to enter the room. Visitors should report to the nurses' station for directions on what to do to enter the room. Hospital staff caring for these patients in intensive care areas may wear gowns or aprons and gloves. On wards, staff will wear aprons and gloves. All staff should ensure that hand hygiene is performed as necessary.

Hand hygiene is a key way to prevent the spread of any infection. There is an alcohol based hand cleanser at the entrance to all wards – patients, visitors and staff are encouraged to use the hand gel to clean their hands whenever they enter and leave a ward.

What precautions should be taken when a patient is discharged home?

The nursing staff will give discharge instructions. However in most cases good hand hygiene is all that is required.

Remember that *Acinetobacter* does not usually pose a threat to healthy people; this includes hospital staff and family members or close contacts or an *Acinetobacter* carrier.



We are currently working towards a smoke free site. Smoking is only permitted in the designated smoking areas.

For advice and support in quitting, contact your GP or the free NHS stop smoking helpline on 0800 169 0 169

Help with this leaflet:



If you would like this information in another language, large print or audio format, please ask the department to contact Patient Information: 01223 216032 or patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk



Document history

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