Acinetobacter

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 in 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 noses 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 nose, throat or skin.

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 the Acinetobacter are placed on isolation precautions. This means that they are cared for apart from other patients, although they continue to receive the same high standard of care. Hospital staff caring for these patients will wear gowns and gloves. A card 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.

Good hand hygiene is a key way to prevent the spread of any infection. There are alcohol-based hand gel dispensers at the entrances 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 of an Acinetobacter carrier.