

Infection Prevention and You



Nightmare Bacteria: What are they, and what can I do?

Perhaps you've heard about drug-resistant "Superbugs" in the news. These new threats we are facing now are called "Nightmare Bacteria." Some of these germs include: Vancomycin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (VRSA), [Candida auris](#), and carbapenem-resistant Enterobacteriaceae ([CRE](#)).

Nightmare bacteria are resistant to all antibiotic treatments and can share their genes for resistance with other germs. When bacteria do not respond to antibiotics, it makes them extremely hard to treat. A recent report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), counted more than 200 cases of nightmare bacterial infections in 2017. Additionally, the CDC estimates that more than 23,000 Americans die a year related to antibiotic-resistant infections. The CDC explains that nightmare bacteria spread like wildfire and have special genes that allow them to share their resistance to other germs.

In order to get sick from nightmare bacteria, a person must be exposed to it. Nightmare bacteria are more likely to occur in healthcare settings, so patients with indwelling devices, such as catheters, tubes, or drains, may be most vulnerable. Nightmare bacteria can cause a variety of illnesses, so symptoms may range from a wound that doesn't heal to a bloodstream infection causing sepsis. It is also possible to not have any symptoms at all.

How do we wake up from this nightmare?

Because nightmare bacteria are virtually untreatable, prevention is key! The CDC's Principal Deputy Director, Anne Schuchat, MD, stated the CDC's strategy to contain nightmare bacteria appears to be working. "...With an aggressive response, we've been able to stomp [nightmare bacteria] out promptly, and stop their spread between people, between facilities, and between other germs," Schuchat said.

It is possible for antibiotic resistance to spread between people, between facilities, and between germs. Hospitals and other healthcare environments should work with labs to rapidly identify and contain these germs, as well as improve infection prevention practices within their facilities.

Patients and their families can take these steps to protect themselves from infection in a healthcare facility:

1. Keep hands clean by washing with soap and water or using alcohol-based hand rubs.
2. Ask others to perform hand hygiene prior to touching you or your environment.
3. Tell your healthcare provider if you recently received care in another country or facility.
4. Discuss with your healthcare provider how you can take a more active role in preventing your risk for infection, especially with chronic conditions.
5. Learn the ABCs of antibiotics. Knowing when antibiotics are appropriate can help stop the spread of antibiotic resistant germs. www.apic.org/ABCs-of-Antibiotics

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What to do if you get sick from Nightmare Bacteria?

1. Take medication exactly as prescribed by your healthcare provider.
2. Only take medication prescribed to you; don't share or use leftover antibiotics.
3. Don't ask for antibiotics – your healthcare provider will prescribe them if they're needed.

Infection prevention is everybody's business. Learn the [infection prevention basics](#) for patients and families to prevent the spread of germs. It is also important for healthcare professionals to [protect their patients](#).

Additional Resources

APIC—Hand Hygiene and Antimicrobial Stewardship <https://apic.org/For-Consumers/Monthly-alerts-for-consumers/Article?id=hand-hygiene-and-antimicrobial-stewardship>

APIC—The ABCs of Antibiotics <http://www.apic.org/ABCs-of-Antibiotics>

APIC—Infection Prevention Basics <http://professionals.site.apic.org/infection-prevention-basics/>

APIC—Protect your Patients <http://professionals.site.apic.org/protect-your-patients/>

APIC—*Candida auris* <https://apic.org/For-Consumers/Monthly-alerts-for-consumers/Article?id=candida-aurisa-new-threat-to-patients>

APIC—CRE The Nightmare Bacteria <https://apic.org/For-Consumers/Monthly-alerts-for-consumers/Article?id=cre-the-nightmare-bacteria>

The CDC—Containing Unusual Resistance <https://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/containing-unusual-resistance/index.html>

WHO—Antimicrobial Resistance <http://www.who.int/antimicrobial-resistance/en>

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