

Acinetobacter (ass-in-ée-toe-back-ter)

What is *Acinetobacter*?

Acinetobacter is a group of bacteria commonly found in soil and water, but they can survive on various surfaces (moist and dry). *Acinetobacter* bacteria can also be found on the skin of healthy people, especially healthcare personnel. While there are many types or “species” of *Acinetobacter* and all can cause human disease, *Acinetobacter baumannii* accounts for about 80% of reported infections. Unfortunately, strains of *A. baumannii* that are multi-drug (antibiotic) resistant are becoming a problem in healthcare settings worldwide.

How is *Acinetobacter* spread?

Acinetobacter can be spread to susceptible persons by person-to-person contact, contact with contaminated surfaces, or exposure in the environment.

Outbreaks of drug-resistant *Acinetobacter* infections typically occur in intensive care units and healthcare settings housing very ill patients. *Acinetobacter* infections rarely occur outside of healthcare settings.

What are the symptoms of *Acinetobacter*?

Acinetobacter causes a variety of diseases, ranging from pneumonia to serious blood or wound infections and the symptoms vary depending on the disease. *Acinetobacter* may also “colonize” or live in a patient without causing infection or symptoms, especially in tracheostomy sites or open wounds.

Are certain people at risk of getting *Acinetobacter*?

Acinetobacter poses very little risk to healthy people. However, people who have weakened immune systems, chronic lung disease, or diabetes may be more susceptible to *Acinetobacter* infections. Hospitalized patients, especially very ill patients on a ventilator, those with a prolonged hospital stay, or those who have open wounds, are also at greater risk for drug-resistant *Acinetobacter*.

What is the treatment for *Acinetobacter*?

Acinetobacter species are innately resistant to many commonly prescribed antibiotics. Decisions on treatment of infections with *Acinetobacter* should be made on a case-by-case basis by a healthcare provider. A microbiology laboratory must run tests to determine which antibiotics will treat the infection. *Acinetobacter* infection typically occurs in very ill patients and can either cause or contribute to death in these patients.

Am I at risk in taking care of patients with *Acinetobacter*?

This type of infection generally occurs in very ill patients. As a healthy individual, you are **not** at risk of “catching” this type of infection. However, without taking proper infection control precautions, you are at risk of spreading *Acinetobacter* to other patients.

How can *Acinetobacter* be prevented in the healthcare setting?

Acinetobacter can live on the skin and may survive in the environment for several days. Careful attention to infection control procedures such as hand hygiene and environmental cleaning can reduce the risk of transmission.

To prevent spreading drug-resistant *Acinetobacter* bacteria between patients, the CDC recommends use of contact isolation precautions, enhanced environmental cleaning, dedicated patient care equipment, and prudent use of antibiotics. Healthcare personnel should follow specific infection control precautions, such as wearing gowns and gloves when entering the room of a patient infected with drug-resistant *Acinetobacter* and strict adherence to hand hygiene (See: [Guideline for Isolation Precautions: Preventing Transmission of Infectious Agents in Healthcare Settings 2007](#)).

To prevent the spread of infections, patients should also clean their hands frequently, including:

- before preparing or eating food
- before touching eyes, nose, or mouth
- before and after changing wound dressings or bandages
- after using the restroom
- after blowing nose, coughing, or sneezing
- after touching hospital surfaces, such as bed rails, bedside tables, doorknobs, remote controls, or the phone

Information on infection control practices, hand hygiene, and environmental cleaning in healthcare facilities is available in the following documents:

- Hand Hygiene in Healthcare Settings (<http://www.cdc.gov/handhygiene>)
- Guideline for Isolation Precautions in Hospitals (<http://www.cdc.gov/hicpac/pdf/isolation/Isolation2007/pdf>)
- Guidelines for Environmental Infection Control in Healthcare Facilities (http://www.cdc.gov/hicpac/pdf/guidelines/eic_in_hcf_03.pdf)

For more information regarding *Acinetobacter*, visit the following resources:

- <http://www.cdc.gov/HAI/organisms/acinetobacter.html>
- <http://www.cdc.gov/hicpac/pdf/MDRO/MDROGuideline2006.pdf> (Management of Multi-drug Resistant Organisms in Healthcare Settings, 2006)