

# 'New Delhi' superbug unfairly named, admits editor

January 12 2011

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The naming of a drug-resistant superbug after New Delhi unfairly stigmatised India, the editor of the medical journal that first published research into the disease has admitted.

The [Lancet](#) journal revealed in August the discovery of a [superbug](#) that could pose a global threat like [Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome](#) (SARS) or human [swine flu](#).

Researchers named the enzyme "New Delhi metallo-beta-lactamase 1 (NDM-1)" as some victims had recently travelled to India for medical treatment and cosmetic surgery -- but health experts in India were furious at the tag.

"It was an error of judgement," Richard Horton, editor of the London-based [Lancet](#) told reporters on Tuesday during a visit to Delhi. "We didn't think of its implications for which I sincerely apologise."

The name "unnecessarily stigmatised a single country and city" and should be changed by researchers, he added.

Indian doctors complained the name incorrectly suggested New Delhi was the origin of the bug -- and some politicians saw a conspiracy designed to scupper the country's booming health tourism industry.

The government health ministry angrily dismissed The [Lancet](#)'s report as exaggerated and unfair, and publicly complained about the name.

The NDM-1 gene was first identified in 2009 by Cardiff University's Timothy Walsh in two types of bacteria -- *Klebsiella pneumoniae* and [Escherichia coli](#) -- in a Swedish patient admitted to hospital in India.

After The Lancet article, cases were reported in Canada, the United States, Belgium, the Netherlands, Austria, France, Germany, Kenya, Australia, Hong Kong and Japan.

Horton said he stood by the study's research.

India has been criticised in the past for having a loose policy on the use of antibiotics, with the result that they are over-prescribed and over-used to the point where [resistant strains](#) become more common.

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