

Super bug researcher calls for global action

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(PhysOrg.com) -- The World Health Organization (WHO) must take a tougher stance on super bugs, according to a University of Queensland infectious diseases expert.

Professor Tim Walsh, from UQ's Centre for Clinical Research, suggests that bacteria is more widespread than previously thought, with his research published in today's issue of *The Lancet*.

The research indicates NDM-1 is present in New Delhi's drinking water and seepage, and thus is widely prevalent in the Indian environment.

Professor Walsh said international efforts were crucial to stem the tide of [antibiotic resistant bacteria](#) (known as NDM-1 positive bacteria).

“Along with the fact that some people infected with the new multi-resistant NDM-1 super bugs did not have a hospital stay in India, this research indicates that NDM-1 positive bacteria are occurring on the streets of New Delhi.”

Professor Walsh said the research highlighted the urgent need for action to limit the global spread of NDM-1 producing bacteria.

“The potential for the spread of superbugs is real and it is time for an unequivocal international commitment to combat the growing threat,” he said.

Only a small number of infections caused by NDM-1 bugs have been

detected in Australia, in travellers returning from India.

“At the moment there are five known cases in Australia and at least two in Queensland. Without exception all have been linked to Southern Asia,” Professor Walsh said.

Professor Walsh said the study showed there was an urgent need for broad epidemiological and environmental studies to be done, not just in India, but also in Pakistan and Bangladesh, which are source countries for other exported cases of infection.

“There are many good documents written, not least by the WHO, listing key points to curb antibiotic resistance,” he said.

“The trouble is that these are merely recommendations which can be adhered to or totally ignored – sadly it is easy to ignore them.

“But we have now reached a point where we can no longer ignore these recommendations and effective measures now need to be enforced.

“A holistic approach and a change of social priorities in various countries is needed, however, it may well be too late to save one of medicine's most precious and long standing resources – antibiotics.”

Professor Walsh said screening of hospital transfer patients from India has already been initiated by French, Chinese and Korean health authorities and is being considered in the UK.

The Lancet article - “Dissemination of NDM-1 positive bacteria in the New Delhi

environment and its implications for human health: an environmental point prevalence study”- is the first molecular study to look at superbugs in the general environment, rather than a hospital environment.

A group of journalists from Channel 4 News in the UK were central to the research.

They helped collect the seepage and water samples in India for analysis by researchers at Cardiff University, where Professor Walsh was based.

Professor Walsh said he and his colleagues, many based in India, were very keen to facilitate further studies in Southern Asia to help establish key risk factors for acquisition and spread of NDM-1 positive bugs and to identify intervention measures to curb their spread.

Professor Walsh's previous NDM-1 research (also published in *The Lancet*) revealed the presence of super bugs in hospitals in India, Afghanistan, Bangladesh and their subsequent import into the UK. It influenced international trade, caused a mini-run on Chinese markets and attracted a significant reaction from the Indian government and surgeons.

Provided by University of Queensland

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