

Alarm at spread of superbugs beyond hospitals

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DANGEROUS superbugs that previously had been found only in hospitals are starting to spread throughout the community, putting lives at risk.

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The state and federal governments are so concerned by the rise in infections they have commissioned an expert group to try to stop it, the *Herald* has learnt.

The chairman of the Australian Group on Antimicrobial Resistance, John Turnidge, said the Antimicrobial Resistance Subcommittee would have its findings reported to state and federal health ministers. "People in a position with the authority to make changes are now saying we have got to make changes," Professor Turnidge said.

The Australian Group on Antimicrobial Resistance has released a survey of 30 hospitals treating outpatients for infections. The survey found a "worrying trend" of *E. coli* and *Klebsiella* species that produce enzymes which make them resistant to some of the most powerful antibiotics.

E. coli is a common bacteria found in humans, dogs, cats and other mammals. It can cause urinary tract and post-operative wound infections and is often the cause of severe blood poisoning.

"These strands of *E. coli* are carrying a form of resistance which we never wanted to see in the community, and that is resistance to our hospital drugs," Professor Turnidge said.

"We have gone from virtually none of these kinds of resistance in the year 2000 to now, where it's commonplace."

The superbugs are a particular threat because they require expensive hospital treatment and the use of last-line antibiotics, which need to be used sparingly to ensure the bugs do not develop resistance to them.

"The more we use them, the more resistance we are going to see," Professor Turnidge said. "It's kind of a vicious circle."

Sydney had a noticeably higher rate of superbugs than other states, although the overall differences between the states was small, he said.

Antibiotic overuse was a likely driver of the superbug spread, with rates of use here still double that of best-practice countries such as the Netherlands and Sweden. A [study](#) released this month by the National Prescribing Service found most Australians are confused about when they should take antibiotics and how they work.

"The high level of antibiotic use in the community is fuelling the carriage of these [resistant strains] to a ... level that didn't exist before," Professor Turnidge said.

This story was found at: <http://www.smh.com.au/national/alarm-at-spread-of-superbugs-beyond-hospitals-20120429-1xt1z.html>