

Special Audio Report Transcript

Headline: Southern California Hospitals Taking Action To Combat Spread of Drug-Resistant 'Superbug'

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TEXT:

I'm Mina Kim with a report on how hospitals are dealing with a dangerous drug-resistant bacteria recently found in Southern California health care facilities. This is a special report for *California Healthline*, a daily news service of the California HealthCare Foundation.

Hospital officials say their infection control efforts are in high gear to address CRKP -- or carbapenem-resistant Klebsiella pneumonia -- an illness that is spread through person-to-person contact and can lead to death. A study by the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health found more than 350 cases of the disease in the region's health care facilities last year. A handful of cases came from Olive View-UCLA Medical Center. Greg Moran is a physician there in the Department of Emergency Medicine and Division of Infectious Diseases. He also sits on the hospital's infections controls committee.

(Moran): "When we do identify these cases, we put patients into isolation, and we have extra-strict precautions about hand washing, about not sharing devices and equipment between patients, and hopefully that way we can try to reduce the spread of these organisms between patients."

Moran says a strain resistant to carbapenems is a big concern for hospitals. He says carbapenems have long been considered the big gun in the antibiotic arsenal for highly resistant bacteria. One drug that can kill CRKP is colistin, but Moran says colistin is like a chemical detergent and can have harmful side effects.

(Moran): "We hesitate to use it unless we're really up against a wall, just because of concerns about toxicity. We also don't have a lot of studies showing how effective it really is for some of these infections."

Highly drug-resistant bacteria tend to strike people with prolonged hospitalizations or those who take long courses of antibiotics. CRKP also has been found in long-term care facilities. Moran says his hospital has been on the lookout for bugs among patients from these care settings.

(Moran): "We have now started isolating all patients from nursing homes, just recognizing that we're seeing so many of these resistant"

bugs -- not just CRKPs, but also ESBLs and other types of resistant bugs coming from a lot of our local nursing homes. So we have become more aggressive about isolating these patients upfront, even before we confirm that they actually have one."

Moran says his hospital also has had an antimicrobial stewardship program for years. It's a program to help curb the overuse of broad spectrum antibiotics that can lead to multidrug resistant strains.

(Lott): "Well, I would hope that consumers would still believe that their hospitals are safe."

Jim Lott is executive vice president of the Hospital Association of Southern California. He says the region's hospitals are well-equipped to deal with super-resistant bugs and they have effective prevention protocols in place.

(Lott): "We're not new and inexperienced at managing this, and so no one should feel as though their life is in jeopardy by coming to a hospital for a needed procedure or needed medical care."

Patient advocates say hospitals still need to do more to ensure CRKP does not spread to communities. The bacterium so far has been confined to health care facilities. Julia Hallisy is cofounder of the Empowered Patient Coalition based in San Francisco. She says hospitals have good policies in place. The problem is that they're not always enforcing them.

(Hallisy): "I think we're going to need unit-level surveillance and supervision to be sure these best practices are being implemented. So having extra staff if necessary out on the floors and watching what's happening at the bedside."

Hallisy says patients also have a role to play in curbing the spread of drug-resistant bacteria, including practicing good hygiene and making sure providers have washed their hands or cleaned off their equipment.

(Hallisy): "A big one is certainly not to demand antibiotics for every little illness. I'm a practicing dentist, so I have patients all the time insist on getting antibiotics for things that are actually viral infections."

Physician Greg Moran says it's timelier than ever for patients to understand the importance of appropriate antibiotic use.

(Moran): "We are running into a situation in recent years that it seems that the supply of new antibiotics that are under development is shrinking. So we don't have as many new antibiotics in the pipeline as we did in year's past. And that is a reason for concern."

Thirty-five other states have officially reported cases of CRKP. Health officials suspect it's also in the remaining 14 states where reporting isn't required.

This has been a special report for *California Healthline*, a daily news service of the California HealthCare Foundation. If you have feedback or other issues you'd like to have addressed, please email us at CHL@CHCF.org. I'm Mina Kim, thanks for listening.