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# Alarm bells over 'New Delhi' bug, Govt says unfair to blame India

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TEENA THACKER  
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 11

## GERM OF A CRISIS

AN international team of scientists has discovered a new superbug in many people who have recently been in India, and they say there are virtually no drugs to treat it.

**NEW DELHI METALLO-1** or NDM-1, is a new gene that alters bacteria, transforming them into superbugs resistant to nearly all known antibiotics.

In a study published in *The Lancet Infectious Diseases Journal* Wednesday, the researchers reported a new gene called New Delhi metallo-beta-lactamase, or NDM-1, which they said makes bacteria resistant to nearly all antibiotics, including the most powerful class called carbapenems.

**E. COLI BACTERIA**, the most common cause of urinary tract infections, have been found to have been largely altered by NDM-1.

Lead researcher Timothy Walsh, from Britain's Cardiff University, was quoted by Reuters as saying that with more and more foreigners travelling to countries like India for medical treatment and cosmetic surgery, he feared the new superbug could soon spread across the world.

**35 PEOPLE** recently back in the UK after undergoing surgery in India or Pakistan have been detected with the superbug.

**INDIA** is thought to be already largely infected, and "the potential of NDM-1 to be a worldwide public health problem is great".

"This is a real concern. Because of medical tourism and international travel in general, resistance to these types of bacteria has the potential to spread around the world very, very quickly. And there is nothing in the pipeline to tackle it," Walsh was quoted as saying.

**AUSTRALIA, Canada, the Netherlands, US and Sweden** — countries from where many medical tourists visit India — have also reported the gene.

Walsh's team studied bacterial isolates from Chennai and Haryana in India to conclude that NDM-1 has made two common bacteria, *E. Coli* (which causes urinary tract infections) and *K. Peumoniae* (which causes pneumonia), resistant to most antibiotics, including carbapenems.

on a particular country. "Multi-drug resistance can be found anywhere in the world. It is unfair to blame India for that," said Dr VM Katoch, Secretary, Health Research.

In the UK, the study said, of the 29 patients who were screened, "at least 17 had a history of travelling to India or Pakistan within one year, and 14 of them were found to be admitted to a hospital in these countries".

Dr Anoop Misra of Fortis Hospitals said the findings underscore the dangers of overuse and misuse of antibiotics, which fuel the rise of drug-resistant superbug infections. "This just goes to show that indiscriminate use of antibiotics is dangerous. A rational policy for usage of antibiotics is needed in India," Dr Anoop Misra said.

Health experts in India said it was unfair to blame the existence of a superbug

Dr Anita Kotwani of Patel Chest Institute, University of Delhi, agreed: "Most hospitals in India do not have a policy on antibiotics. Doctors prescribe them indiscriminately, leading to drug resistance in patients. The developed world has realised the importance of the rational use of drugs, but India hasn't."