Bug of the Month

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I'm a Gram-Negative Swimming Champion

Excuse me while I towel off; I just went for a dip in some lovely contaminated water in the hospital whirlpool.

Even though my usual hang-outs are in hydrotherapy settings and sink traps, maybe after lunch I’ll go slumming on some respiratory equipment, too.

I’m an aerobic Gram-negative, and I have a handsome rod shape that gets noticed globally, even though I don’t need a passport to get around.

Because I’m aquatic by nature (I’m a Pisces, don’t you know!), I love causing swimmer’s ear in the community as well as triggering folliculitis in non-immunocompromised individuals.

I’m a real go-getter in the healthcare environment, too, seeing that I’m the leading cause of respiratory tract-related healthcare-associated infections (HAIs). I also can cause urinary tract infections (UTIs) and I love mucking around in wounds for sport.

I love nothing better than to cause peritonitis in dialysis patients, and my special skill is gifting bacteremia to burn patients. But I especially relish triggering infections of the blood, pneumonia, and infections following surgery which can lead to severe illness and death. I’m a Grim Reaper, alright, since I kill about 400 people a year.

I get spread around on the hands of healthcare workers or by equipment that gets contaminated and is not properly cleaned. And let’s face it, hospital workers don’t always go after me with absolute rigor.

Even though I think I’m charming, I’ve discovered that people in the hospital environment wish to avoid me at all costs. Therefore, they have been paying careful attention to routine infection control practices, especially hand hygiene and environmental cleaning. I hate to admit it, but these strategies can substantially resist my infectious nature. Outside the hospital, you can avoid hot tubs or pools that may be poorly maintained, and keep contact lenses, equipment, and solutions from becoming contaminated. After all, a few laps in water makes me very, very happy.

You can take antibiotics to try to treat the infections that I cause, but good luck with that; I’m becoming more resistant with every passing day. Wanna know my stats? I cause around 51,000 healthcare-associated infections in the U.S. annually, and more than 6,000 of these are multidrug-resistant. Who am I?

Pseudomonas aeruginosa

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