

## BHEKISISA TRACKING EMBED CODE



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Headline: [WATCH] Why SA's running out of drugs to treat this superbug

Blurb: Healthcare-associated infections occur when a person acquires an infection while they are admitted into a hospital. One of the most deadly is a bacterium that has developed resistance against three out of the four antibiotics we can use to treat it.

Bullets:

- Bacteria that cause infections acquired in hospitals are on the WHO's list of germs that are becoming difficult to fight.
- Among this group are the ESKAPE bacteria, a set of superbugs for which there are only a few antibiotics that work against them.
- *Klebsiella pneumoniae* or "K" is resistant to three out of the four antibiotics hospitals in South Africa have access to.

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Have you heard of a group of bacteria called ESKAPE?

It's an acronym for the six types of bacteria that most existing drugs no longer kill.

The "K" in ESKAPE stands for *Klebsiella pneumoniae*.

"K" has become one of the most common untreatable bacteria found in South Africa's hospitals.

### **What is *Klebsiella pneumoniae*?**

This bacterium lives in your gut.

It's usually harmless, but this type of germ becomes dangerous when it infects other parts of the body, especially while someone is in hospital.

There are four types of antibiotics that can be used to treat *Klebsiella pneumoniae* bacterium.

Only two of them still work.

And one of those medicines has restricted access, so doctors have to apply for special permission from the South African Health Products Regulatory Authority to use it.

### **How did this happen?**

Antibiotics become resistant when they're used too often or when the wrong type of drug is prescribed.

The germs then learn how to survive the medicine's attack.

In 2016 almost two-thirds of "K" could be cleared up with a group of antibiotics called fluoroquinolones.

Fast forward to 2020 and less than half of "K" infections could be treated with this drug.

During that same four-year period, seven out of ten blood samples from patients infected with "K" showed strains of the bacteria that were resistant to another antibiotic that could treat it.

Today, our second last option is a type of antibiotic called carbapenems. But a quarter of "K" infections are already resistant to this antibiotic.

Colistin is the final resort, so its use is restricted by the World Health Organisation.

It also has severe side effects such as kidney damage.

*This story was produced by the [Bhekisisa Centre for Health Journalism](#). Sign up for the [newsletter](#).*