

Highlight: Bacterial biofilms make the seeds of their own undoing

April 29 2010

The slime on your shower walls, the plaque on your teeth, the coatings that can form on medical instruments or hospital surfaces--all of these are bacterial biofilms, communities of bacteria that can persist despite scrubbing or even antibiotic treatment.

New research shows that at least one type of [bacteria](#), *Bacillus subtilis*, produces certain [amino acids](#) that actually prevent biofilm formation and trigger the breakdown of existing biofilms, researchers report in the April 30 issue of *Science*.

As biofilms age, their nutrient supply decreases, waste products accumulate, and it becomes more advantageous for the [cells](#) to return to their individual, free-floating forms.

Ilana Kolodkin-Gal and colleagues have found that *B. subtilis* bacteria secrete an unusual type of amino acid, D-amino acid, which releases them from the aging communities. D-amino acids, which are produced by many bacteria, may be a widespread signal for biofilm disassembly, according to the authors, who suggest that these amino acids could be useful in medical or industrial settings as anti-biofilm agents.

More information: "D-Amino Acids Trigger Biofilm Disassembly," by I. Kolodkin-Gal; *Science*, April 30.

Provided by AAAS

Citation: Highlight: Bacterial biofilms make the seeds of their own undoing (2010, April 29)
retrieved 28 April 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2010-04-highlight-bacterial-biofilms-seeds.html>

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