

Carbapenemase-producing Enterobacteriaceae (CPE): I am colonised/ have an infection – What does this mean?

An information guide



Carbapenemase-producing Enterobacteriaceae (CPE) : I am colonised/ have an infection – What does this mean?

What does 'Carbapenemase-producing Enterobacteriaceae (CPE)' mean?

Enterobacterales are a large family of bacteria that usually live harmlessly in the gut of humans causing no problems. This is called 'colonisation' (a person is said to be a 'carrier').

However, if the bacteria get into the wrong place, such as the bladder or bloodstream they can cause infection.

Carbapenemase-producing Enterobacteriaceae (sometimes called CPE) is the name given to a group of germs (bacteria) that have become very resistant to antibiotics including those called carbapenems.

Why does carbapenem resistance matter?

Carbapenem antibiotics are a powerful group of antibiotics that can only be given in hospital directly into the bloodstream. Until now, doctors have relied on them to successfully treat certain 'difficult' infections when other antibiotics have failed to do so.

In a hospital, where there are many vulnerable patients, spread of resistant bacteria can cause problems.

Does carriage of CPE need to be treated?

If a person is a carrier of CPE, they do not need to be treated. However, if the bacteria have caused an infection then treatment is required and antibiotics will be given.

How did I 'pick up' CPE?

As mentioned above, sometimes these bacteria can be found, living harmlessly, in the gut of humans and so it can be difficult to say when or where you picked it up.

However, there is an increased chance of picking up these bacteria if you have been a patient in a hospital abroad or in a UK hospital that has had patients carrying the bacteria, or if you have been in contact with a carrier of this germ elsewhere.

How will I be cared for whilst in hospital?

You may be accommodated in a single room. You may also be asked to provide a number of samples, depending on your length of stay, to check if you are still carrying the bacteria.

The samples might include a rectal swab i.e. a sample taken by inserting a swab briefly just inside your rectum, and / or a faecal sample. You will normally be informed of the results within two to three days.

How can the spread of CPE be prevented?

Accommodating you in a single room helps to prevent spread of the bacteria. Healthcare workers should wash their hands or use alcohol hand rub regularly. They will use gloves and aprons when caring for you to help prevent spread of any germs.

The most important measure for you to take is to wash your hands well with soap and water, especially after going to the toilet.

You should avoid touching medical devices (if you have any) such as your urinary catheter tube and your intravenous drip, particularly at the point where it is inserted into the body or skin.

Visitors will be asked to wash their hands on entering and leaving the room. The Visitor may be asked to wear an apron and gloves if taking an active part in your care.

What about when I go home?

As soon as your general condition allows and your doctors consider you are ready for discharge, you can go home.

Whilst there is a chance that you may still be a carrier when you go home you may not be showing signs of infection. No special measures or treatment are required; any infection will have been treated prior to your discharge.

You should carry on as normal, maintaining good hand hygiene using soap and warm running water. You should wash your hands before preparing food or eating and directly after using the toilet.

Good personal hygiene is important; this will help protect you from infection and reduce the risk of spread to others.

Where can I find more information?

If you would like any further information please speak to a member of your care staff, who may also contact the Infection Prevention and Control Team for you.

The Public Health England website is another source of information:

Public Health England. 2020. Framework of actions to contain carbapenemase - producing Enterobacterales. [ONLINE] Available at:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/923385/Framework_of_actions_to_contain_CPE.pdf [Accessed 21st January 21].

For further information about the evidence used in this leaflet please visit www.pat.nhs.uk

If English is not your first language and you need help, please contact the Interpretation and Translation Service

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