



Carbapenemase-producing enterobacterales

This leaflet explains what having Carbapenemase-producing enterobacterales (CPE) means and how it is managed.

What does ‘carbapenemase-producing enterobacterales’ mean?

Enterobacterales are bacteria that usually live harmlessly in the gut of humans. This is called ‘colonisation’ (a person is said to be a ‘carrier’). However, if the bacteria gets into another site where it does not normally reside like the bladder or blood stream they can cause infection. Carbapenems are a group of antibiotics used to treat some ‘difficult’ infections. Carbapenemases are enzymes (chemicals), made by some strains of these bacteria, which allow them to destroy carbapenem antibiotics and so the bacteria are resistant to the antibiotics.

Why does carbapenem resistance matter?

Carbapenem antibiotics 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.

Do carriers 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 antibiotics will be required.

How did I ‘pick up’ CPE?

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 risk 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 elsewhere

How will I be cared for while in hospital?

You will be accommodated in a single room on current and all subsequent admissions. Depending on your length of stay, you may be asked to provide a number of samples, to check if you are still carrying the bacteria. The samples might include a number of swabs from certain areas, such as where the tube for your drip (if you have one) enters the skin, a rectal swab i.e. a sample taken by inserting a swab briefly just inside your rectum (bottom), and / or a faecal (poo) 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 the spread of bacteria. Healthcare workers will wear gloves and aprons when caring for you. Strict environmental and equipment cleaning processes will be in place. 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 and may be asked to wear gloves and aprons if they are giving direct care e.g. washing and dressing.

What about when I go home?

While there is a chance that you may still be a carrier when you go home. Usually, this will go away with time. No special measures or treatment are required; any infection will have been treated prior to your discharge. You should carry on as normal, but the most important measure you and our family members can take is to maintain good personal hygiene, including washing hands with soap and water, especially after going to the toilet. Good hygiene such as keeping toilet and bathroom areas clean and using separate towels are the best ways to prevent the spread. Clothes and laundry in the household should be washed normally at the hottest temperature advised on the label.

If you have any concerns you may wish to contact your GP for advice.

IMPORTANT: If you or a member of your household is admitted to hospital, you should let the hospital staff know that you are / have been a CPE carrier (or that a member of your household is / has been a carrier of CPE).

Questions and concerns

If you have any questions or concerns about CPE, please ask your nurse for further information or you can contact the Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust Infection Control team on 0118 322 6914, email: infection.control@royalberkshire.nhs.uk.

How do I find out more?

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-to-contain-carbapenemase-producing-enterobacterales-cpe>

United Kingdom Health Security Agency Website:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/uk-health-security-agency>

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

Simon Wells, RBFT Infection Prevention & Control, November 2024

Next review due: November 2026