

Information for patients A Guide to CPE



Infection Prevention and Control

What is CPE?

CPE is short for carbapenemase-producing Enterobacteriaceae. Enterobacteriaceae are bacteria that usually live harmlessly in the gut of humans. This is called 'colonisation', and a person can sometimes be called a 'carrier'. However, if these bacteria get into the wrong place, such as the bladder or bloodstream they can cause infection. Carbapenems are one of the most powerful antibiotics available. Carbapenemases are enzymes (chemicals), which can destroy carbapenem antibiotics making the bacteria resistant and infections difficult to treat. There are very few antibiotics available to treat infections caused by CPE.

How does CPE spread?

CPE is passed directly or indirectly through faecal contamination of hands or objects (for example, through poor hand hygiene after going to the toilet), and then introduced into the mouth. It can also be spread on the hands of patients, relatives, and healthcare workers after contact with an infected patient or contaminated equipment. As patients in hospital are much more vulnerable to infection than patients in their own homes, special precautions are required to prevent the spread of CPE between patients in hospital.

How did I get CPE?

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 the UK that has had patients carrying the bacteria, or if you have been in contact with a carrier elsewhere.

Can CPE be treated?

Carriage (or colonisation) of CPE will not require treatment. However, carriers of CPE will be nursed in a side room with additional precautions, to ensure that CPE does not spread to other equipment, areas and patients on the ward.

Can I have visitors whilst in hospital? Will CPE harm family and friends?

Yes. We advise that normal and social contact does not pose a significant risk to other healthy people, including pregnant women, children, and babies. Your visitors will not usually have to wear gloves or aprons. If any of your visitors wish to be involved in your personal care, or if there is a particular concern about risk to a person, please discuss with nursing staff if you are in hospital. It is recommended that visitors do not sit on hospital beds and that they clean their hands before and after visiting.

When should I wash my hands?

The most important thing you can do to prevent the spread of CPE is to make regular and thorough hand washing as part of your daily routine, especially:

- Before eating or handling food
- After using the toilet /commode
- After touching your wound, catheter
- After blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing
- After touching animals or animal waste
- After handling soiled clothing/rubbish
- After changing a nappy
- Before and after touching a sick or injured person
- Before, during and after a visit to a hospital ward or residential or nursing home

Do not forget to encourage children to wash their hands at these times too. It is ok to remind healthcare staff to wash their hands. It may feel like an awkward question to ask when someone is looking after you, but you are entitled to ask if you are concerned.

What happens after I go home?

You may still be a carrier of CPE when you go home. No special measures or treatment are required at home. You should continue as normal, maintaining good hand hygiene. Before you leave hospital, ask the doctor or nurse to give you a letter or card advising that you have had an infection and may still be a carrier of CPE. This will be useful for the future, and it is important that you make healthcare staff aware of it. Should you or a member of your household be admitted to hospital, you should let the hospital staff know that you are or have been a carrier of CPE and show them the letter/card.

How do I know if I still have CPE?

There is no answer to how long a person may carry the bacteria. The length of time could be anything from a few days to indefinitely. Treatment with certain antibiotics (for any infection) may also affect length of carriage. Effective hygiene practices for all individuals receiving care will minimise the transmission of CPE.

How to manage or wash your soiled clothing?

We do not wash patients' personal clothing in hospital. If your own clothing becomes soiled, your clothes will be sealed in a special pink dissolvable bag. This pink bag will then be placed into a white plastic 'patient's property' bag and stored in your locker, ready to be washed at home.

How to wash soiled clothing using a washing machine:

1. Take the pink bag out of the white 'patient's property' bag.
2. Place the pink bag into the washing machine. Do not open the pink bag as it has been specially designed to go straight into the washing machine. Do not add any other items of clothing into the washing machine.
3. You should always wash your hands thoroughly after handling soiled clothing, or the bag of soiled clothing.
4. Use a biological powder, liquid, or tablets if possible.
5. Use a pre-wash cycle before the main wash cycle.
6. Wash the items at the very least 60°C so that the pink bag dissolves and releases the clothing into the washing machine (washing at a lower temperature may not dissolve the bag, which may result in the parts of the bag sticking to the clothing).
7. When the washing cycle is complete, remove the washing from the washing machine and dry the clothing naturally or in a tumble dryer.

Infection prevention and control is everyone's responsibility. Healthcare workers, patients and visitors all have a vital role to play in preventing the spread of healthcare associated infections.

Notes:

If you require a special edition of this leaflet

This leaflet is available in large print. Arrangements can also be made on request for it to be explained in your preferred language. Please contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) email: rjah.pals.office@nhs.net

Feedback

Tell us what you think of our patient information leaflet.
Please send your comments to the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) email: rjah.pals.office@nhs.net

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Created by: Infection Prevention and Control Team

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The Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt
Orthopaedic Hospital NHS Foundation Trust,
Oswestry, Shropshire SY10 7AG
Tel: 01691 404000
www.rjah.nhs.uk