

Carbapenemase-producing Enterobacteriaceae (CPE)

I am a CPE carrier (or have a CPE infection).
What does this mean for me?

Information for patients, relatives and carers

① For more information, please contact:

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What does ‘carbapenemase-producing enterobacteriaceae’ mean?

This leaflet sets out information about a certain group of bacteria, called ‘enterobacteriaceae’ (which is pronounced “Entero-bacteria-c-i”). These bacteria usually live harmlessly in our gut. However, if they find their way into the wrong place (e.g. the bladder or bloodstream), they can cause an infection.

Carbapenems are one of the most powerful types of antibiotics. Until now, doctors have relied on them to successfully treat certain ‘difficult’ infections when other antibiotics have failed. However, some enterobacteriaceae can produce chemicals (called carbapenemases) that destroy carbapenems. These bacteria are said to be resistant to the antibiotics and are called ‘carbapenemase-producing enterobacteriaceae’ (shortened to CPE).

A person with the bacteria in their gut is said to be a CPE carrier.

Why does carbapenem resistance matter?

Infections caused by CPE can be difficult to treat because the bacteria are often resistant to lots of antibiotics.

How are CPE spread?

If a patient in hospital is a CPE carrier it can get into the ward environment and can also be passed on by direct contact with other patients. For these reasons, a CPE carrier will normally stay in a single room with its own toilet facilities. CPE can also pass their carbapenemase-making ability on to other bacteria, further encouraging their spread around the hospital.

My test is positive, what does that mean?

If the result is positive, do ask your doctor or nurse to explain this to you in more detail. You will stay in a single room and staff will wear a long-sleeved gown and gloves when caring for you. This will happen whenever you are admitted to hospital.

If the CPE is causing an infection, your doctors will treat it with antibiotics. However, if there are no signs you have an infection and you are simply 'carrying' the bacteria, no treatment is required.

How can the spread of CPE be prevented?

Keeping you in a single room helps to prevent spread of CPE. Healthcare workers should wash their hands regularly when in your room.

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 a urinary catheter tube or an intravenous drip, particularly near the area it enters the body. Visitors will be asked to wash their hands on entering and leaving the room and may be asked to wear an apron.

What about when I go home?

Whilst you may still be a CPE carrier when you go home, quite often this will go away with time. You should carry on living your life as normal. There is no need to make changes to your lifestyle, or to avoid contact with any friend or family member.

It is important to wash your hands regularly, or use a hand wipe, especially after using the toilet or commode, before meals and when they look dirty. This will help prevent the CPE from spreading.

If you have a wound or a catheter, it is important not to touch them unless you have been advised to do so by your nurse. If you have been asked to empty your urine catheter bag or change a wound dressing, it is important to wash your hands before and after doing it.

Before you leave hospital, ask the doctor or nurse to give you a letter or card saying that you have had a CPE infection or been a CPE carrier. Show this to the doctors or nurses at your GP practice, or if you are admitted to hospital in the future.

If anyone you live with is admitted to hospital they should tell the doctors and nurses that they live with someone who is a CPE carrier.

What about if I need to visit hospital for an outpatient appointment?

If you visit an outpatient department it is likely you will be seen as the last patient on the clinic list. If you have an active CPE infection or diarrhoea you must advise staff immediately so they can find a clinic room for you to wait in. If you have no active infection or diarrhoea you can sit in the waiting room as normal.

When a member of staff gives you direct care (e.g. examination / blood taking / wound dressing) they will wear a long-sleeve disposable apron and gloves.

If you use a toilet then you must advise a member of staff so it can be cleaned after your use. Hand hygiene is vitally important – hands should be washed with soap and water.

If you need blood tests the blood should be taken in the clinic room, rather than in the phlebotomy department.

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.

When you are at home, please contact your GP for further advice if you have any questions or concerns.

Tell us what you think of this leaflet

We hope that you found this leaflet helpful. If you would like to tell us what you think, please contact:
Infection Prevention Team, the York Hospital, Wigginton Road, York, YO31 8HE or telephone 01904 725860.

Teaching, training and research

Our Trust is committed to teaching, training and research to support the development of health and healthcare in our community. Healthcare students may observe consultations for this purpose. You can opt out if you do not want students to observe. We may also ask you if you would like to be involved in our research.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS offers impartial advice and assistance to patients, their relatives, friends and carers. We can listen to feedback (positive or negative), answer questions and help resolve any concerns about Trust services.

PALS can be contacted on 01904 726262, or email pals@york.nhs.uk.

An answer phone is available out of hours.

Leaflets in alternative languages or formats

Please telephone or email if you require this information in a different language or format, for example Braille, large print or audio.

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