

Patient information factsheet

Information for patients who are being screened for CPE

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 (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.

Carbapenems are one of the most powerful types of antibiotics. Carbapenemases are enzymes (chemicals), made by some strains of these bacteria, which allow them to destroy carbapenem antibiotics and so the bacteria are said to be 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 carbapenem antibiotics 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 people who are carriers of CPE need any treatment?

If a person is a carrier of CPE, they do not need any treatment. However, if the bacteria have caused an infection, antibiotics will be needed.

How will I know if I am at risk of being a carrier or having an infection?

Your chance of picking up these bacteria is increased 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. If any of these apply to you, screening will be arranged for you and you will be accommodated in a single room at least until the results are known.

If you are on certain antibiotics, you will also be screened for CPE. You will have one set of swabs taken 48 hours after the start of your course of antibiotics.

What does screening involve?

Screening usually involves taking a rectal swab (a sample taken by inserting a swab briefly just inside your bottom). Alternatively, we may ask you to provide a stool (poo) sample. Occasionally, other samples, such as wound swabs or a urine sample, will be taken. We will normally be able to give you the results within two to three days. The samples will be taken on alternate days on wards and weekly in the critical care units, and will not affect your care in any way.

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What happens if the result is negative?

If the result is negative, the doctors or nurses will check that a further sample is negative before you can be accommodated on the main ward. This will not affect your care in any way. If both results are negative, no further tests will be needed and you will be able to return to the main ward. Screening will be carried out again if you are admitted to hospital.

What happens if the result is positive?

If the result is positive, please ask your doctor or nurse to explain this to you in more detail. We will continue to care for you in a single room while you are still in hospital. If you have an infection, you will need to have antibiotics. However, if there are no signs of infection and you are simply carrying the bacteria, no treatment will be needed.

You will be given a copy of the 'Information for patients who have tested positive for CPE' factsheet, which will give you more information.

How can the spread of CPE be prevented?

Caring for you in a single room helps to prevent the bacteria spreading. The healthcare staff looking after you will wear long sleeved gowns and gloves, and will wash their hands regularly.

The most important thing for you to do is to wash your hands frequently with soap and water (or use wet wipes), especially after going to the toilet. You should avoid touching any medical devices (urinary catheter tubes or intravenous drips, for example), particularly at the point where it is inserted into your body or skin.

We will ask your visitors to wash their hands on entering and leaving your room. We may ask them to wear a gown and gloves if they are assisting with your personal care. Visitors should avoid sitting on your bed and use the chairs provided in the ward.

Where can I find more information?

If you would like any further information, please speak to a member of your healthcare team, who may also contact the infection prevention team for you.

Useful links

www.gov.uk/government/collections/carbapenem-resistance-guidance-data-and-analysis

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