

# Patient Information Sheet for Carbapenem resistant Enterobacteriaceae (CRE)

## What is Carbapenem Resistant Enterobacteriaceae (CRE)?

Enterobacteriaceae are a family of bacteria normally found in the bowels and the feces. Carbapenem is a very strong antibiotic. CRE are enterobacteriaceae that are highly resistant to many antibiotics and may be difficult or impossible to treat.

## Can CRE be harmful?

CRE may live harmlessly in the intestines. This is called colonization. However, enterobacteriaceae, including CRE, can cause urinary tract infections, wound infections, pneumonia, blood stream infections and other serious infections.

## Why should I care about CRE?

CRE can spread from one patient to another in hospitals and long term care facilities (nursing homes). CRE is very difficult to treat. Patients with CRE infection can die from their infection. Hospitals and long term care facilities can prevent spread if they are very careful about hand washing between patients and other infection prevention measures.

## Who is at risk for getting a CRE infection?

Infections are most often seen in patients with prolonged hospitalization and those who are critically ill. Patients on ventilators (breathing machines), or with intravenous catheters or urinary catheters or wounds are more at risk. Patients who have received antibiotics are also more at risk.

## How do people get CRE?

CRE is shed in the feces, urine or draining wounds of patients who are infected or colonized with the bacteria. Patient skin, hands and bedding are likely to be contaminated with the bacteria. Doorknobs, bedrails, light switches, toilets, bedpans, bedside commodes, and bathroom fixtures are also likely to be contaminated. Healthcare workers can spread CRE if they do not use gowns and gloves when coming into contact with the patient or items in the patient's room or if they do not wash their hands between patients. Equipment like blood pressure cuffs, thermometers and other devices can also become contaminated with CRE and spread the infection from one patient to another.

## How can I tell if someone has CRE?

Patients who are infected with CRE have signs and symptoms of infection, but patients who are colonized have no symptoms. The healthcare facility should have a system to alert healthcare providers if someone is infected or colonized with a resistant organism.

### Division of Infectious Disease Epidemiology (DIDE)

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## Is there a treatment for CRE infections?

Very few antibiotics can treat this infection. A microbiology laboratory must run tests to determine which antibiotics will treat the infection.

## What should I do if I am diagnosed with CRE in a healthcare facility?

If you have CRE you may be placed in a private room with your own toilet or commode. If a private room is not available, you will usually be placed in the same room with another patient who has CRE. Always wash your hands with soap and water:

- before eating or
- after using the bathroom or
- after coughing or sneezing or
- after contact with wound drainage or other body fluids

You may be allowed to leave your room and socialize but you must

- wash your hands before leaving your room
- keep any wounds covered
- cover your cough and wash your hands after coughing or sneezing, and
- follow any additional instructions from your doctor or nurse

You should also let your healthcare workers and healthcare facilities know if you have had a positive CRE result before. They can take special precautions to stop CRE spreading to other patients.

## What happens when I am ready to leave the healthcare facility?

You can go home as soon as your doctor says you are ready, even if you have CRE. If you are going to another hospital or nursing home, your nurse or doctor will let them know about your positive CRE result so that they can prevent spread to other patients.

## What happens when I go home?

Clothes, bed linen and dishes can be washed as usual. It is always very important to wash your hands carefully after using the toilet and before preparing meals or eating to stop CRE spreading to other people. Also wash hands after coughing or sneezing, or after changing your dressing. Follow any other instructions your healthcare provider gives you.

## Will I get rid of CRE?

Your body may clear CRE from your bowels as you recover, but this is not always the case, and it may remain in your bowels for some time. Taking antibiotics can encourage CRE to grow in the bowels again, so they should only be taken for a very good reason. Antibiotics are available to treat CRE infection but they will not clear CRE from the bowels.

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