

BACKGROUND

This frequently asked questions (FAQs) document is designed for residents, families of residents and staff of long-term care facilities. It is a supplement to the background information about CRE that is provided in the department Fact Sheet: Carbapenem-resistant Enterobacterales.

Q. WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO KNOW IF A RESIDENT HAS A CARBAPENEMASE-PRODUCING ORGANISM (CPO)?

A. Carbapenemase-producing organisms (CPOs) are bacteria that have an enzyme called a carbapenemase that directly breaks down strong antibiotics called carbapenems. This means that carbapenem antibiotics can't be used to treat these infections. An infection with a CPO may be difficult to treat.

Additionally, the presence of a carbapenemase means that this resistance is easily spread from person-to-person within a healthcare setting.

Q. WHAT KIND OF PRECAUTIONS SHOULD BE TAKEN WITH A PATIENT WHO HAS A CPO?

A. In long-term care facilities, it is recommended that residents with a CPO be placed in a private room, ideally with their own bathroom. Health care workers should follow specific infection control procedures, called "transmission-based precautions." These include wearing gowns and gloves when providing care during high contact resident care activities (i.e., bathing or basic hygiene, toileting, dressing, care of indwelling devices). This is called Enhanced Barrier Precautions. Health care workers should practice hand hygiene frequently, especially before and after patient contact and before and after using gloves.

Q. IF SOMEONE IS COLONIZED WITH A CPO, ARE THEY ABLE TO SPREAD IT TO OTHERS, EVEN IF THEY DON'T HAVE AN INFECTION?

A. For CPOs, the risk of spreading the organism from person-to-person or person-to-environment is the same whether a person has an infection or is colonized with the organism.

Q. IS THERE A TREATMENT THAT CAN BE GIVEN TO GET RID OF A CPO?

A. An infection should be treated by a medical provider as clinically indicated based on the results of antibiotic susceptibility testing. There is no known effective way to treat colonization with a CPO. Attempting to treat CPO colonization with antibiotics may put the patient at unnecessary risk for antibiotic complications and may promote growth of other harmful organisms.

Q. DO FAMILY MEMBERS AND VISITORS NEED TO TAKE ANY SPECIAL PRECAUTIONS WHEN VISITING OR CARING FOR A RESIDENT WITH A CPO?

A. Family members and visitors should follow the policies of the facility. However, it is generally not necessary for them to wear gowns or gloves in the patient room unless they also visit with other residents in the facility (e.g., two family members are in the same facility). If the visitor is going to take an active role in the care of the resident, for example to help with toileting, the visitor should consult with the facility staff to determine if any extra precautions should be taken.

Q. HOW LONG DOES A PERSON STAY COLONIZED WITH A CPO?

A. We don't know how long a person will stay colonized with a CPO. However, there have been circumstances where people were tested for a CPO over long periods of time. Sometimes the CPO colonization shows up in a waxing-and-waning pattern; one test will be negative, and then another test a few months later will be positive for a CPO. It has also been found that persons remain colonized over several years.

This information indicates that there is no reason to continue to test a person who is known to have had a CPO. It is assumed they will have the CPO for the remainder of their lives.

Q. IF A PERSON WITH A CPO INFECTION IS TREATED, DO THEY STILL HAVE THE CPO?

A. Successful treatment of an infection with a CPO means that the clinical signs and symptoms of infection are gone. However, it is likely that the person will still be colonized with the CPO. Once a person has been identified as having a CPO, they should be considered colonized for the remainder of their lives.

Q. IF MY FAMILY MEMBER WITH A CPO IS GOING HOME, IS THERE ANYTHING SPECIAL THAT NEEDS TO BE DONE AT HOME BECAUSE OF THIS INFECTION?

A. The risk of spreading a CPO outside the healthcare environment is low, and no special precautions will need to be taken by friends or family members in a private residence. Home care nurses or other staff should be made aware of the person's history of a CPO and may take additional precautions according to agency policy.

More information can be found at: <https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/programs/HAIP-AS/Pages/HAIP-AS.aspx>

If you have any questions, contact us at RA-DHHAI@pa.gov