

CP patient information leaflet

What are CPE?

CPE are bugs (bacteria) that live in the bowel. CPE is short for Carbapenemase Producing Enterobacterales, but we will use only the short name – CPE – in this leaflet.

CPE are resistant to many antibiotics. This means they are harder to kill with antibiotics than other common bugs that live in the bowel. Sometimes, these bugs that are resistant to antibiotics are called 'superbugs'. CPE are like another superbug called ESBL (ESBL is short for extended-spectrum beta-lactamase producer). The difference is that CPE is even more resistant to antibiotics than ESBLs.

For most people most of the time, CPEs live harmlessly in the bowel and do not cause infection. Sometimes, though, they can get into the bladder and cause bladder infection (cystitis) or kidney infection (pyelonephritis) even in people who are generally in good health.

CPE can cause very serious infection in some patients – for example, when they need intensive care or when they're having chemotherapy. If you get a CPE infection, it can be treated with special antibiotics, but most common antibiotics will not work. If you get a serious infection with CPE, doctors need to know as soon as possible so that you get the right antibiotics as soon as possible.

How did I get CPE?

CPE is a relatively new superbug and is mainly spread through acute hospitals. You might have had it in your bowel for months or even years before you had a test that showed you had CPE. This is because, in most people, a CPE bug can live harmlessly in the bowel for a long time.

Five years ago, CPE were rare except in people who spent a lot of time in hospital. Currently around 500 people will get CPE every year.

What are the symptoms of CPE?

As long as the CPE stays in your bowel, it does not cause an illness. It does not cause diarrhoea or stomach pains. However, if the CPE bug gets into the bladder, kidney or blood, it can cause infection. When this happens the person will often get a temperature, feel pain and start shivering that feels the same as if they had any other infection. The only difference is that, if you need treatment, many of the ordinary antibiotics do not work. Your doctor will have to give you special antibiotics to treat the CPE infection.

How long will I have CPE?

The CPE bug can live in your bowel for months or even years. If you do not have to take antibiotics for a long time, you increase the chance that it will fade away. If you need to take antibiotics often, it will take CPE longer to clear.

How can I reduce the spread of CPE?

The best way to stop spread of all bugs and viruses is to keep the toilet rim, flush handle and seat clean, and to clean your hands thoroughly after going to the toilet, before eating and after touching raw meat.

If you go to hospital, you will notice that the staff will be especially careful to clean their hands after they have been caring for you. Sometimes they will wear aprons and gloves. Also, you may be given a single room if it's possible. These steps are taken to help reduce the spread of CPE in hospital. It is important to tell a member of staff if you know you have CPE.

What happens when I go home?

The risk is very small that CPE will do major harm to people in fairly good general health. You do not need to do anything different from anyone else as you go about your normal life at home and when you're out and about. Clothes, bed linen and dishes can be washed as usual. Just as for everybody else, though, we recommend that you are careful about cleaning your hands thoroughly. Everyone should clean their hands before eating or preparing food. Clean hands protect you and others from the spread of most bugs, not just CPE.

Following good hand hygiene practice all the time helps to prevent the spread of bacteria and viruses. When you use the toilet, it is really important that you leave the toilet clean and in the condition that you would like to find it.

Further information

Please do not hesitate to ask the healthcare staff caring for you if you have any questions, or if you require more information about CPE. Information on hand hygiene, infection control and managing superbugs at home is available on www.hse.ie/hcai or on www.hpsc.ie