

Fact sheet 5 of 6

Subject:

How to manage CPE at home

For:

patients, families and healthcare staff caring for patients with CPE

Carrying CPE can cause great distress to people and these questions will give you information and support to assist you when you return to your home.

What happens when I go home to my family?

If people are in close contact and sharing a home, there is a higher chance that bacteria and viruses will transfer between those people – this is an unavoidable part of human relationships. The issue becomes one of taking practical steps to minimise the spread of all bug, viruses and infections. It is also worth noting that even if a person was to end all contact with a person who they know to carry CPE there may be people we share the bus/office/gym/public toilets/GP waiting room/ hospital clinic with who have CPE or some other antibiotic resistant bacteria. Some of those people do not even know they have CPE/MRSA etc. We know also that many people who travel outside of Europe on holiday may pick up antibiotic resistant bacteria when travelling, so it is impossible to avoid all risk.

One other key point is the difference between the risk of picking up CPE and the risk of the CPE doing any harm. The vast majority of people who pick up CPE will suffer no illness as a result, particularly if they are in good general health; this is true for adults and children. Most people are far more likely to get ill from picking up a respiratory virus or a diarrhoea bug from someone they have household contact with but we tend to accept that as part of life because we are familiar with it. The actual risk to most people of illness from CPE (outside of the acute hospital setting) is very much smaller than the risk from flu or viral gastroenteritis but because we are less familiar with CPE it we tend to see the risk as greater.

Am I a danger to my family and visitors to my home?

If you carry CPE it is okay for your family and friends to come to see you at home. The chance of spread of CPE to most friends and family is usually very small especially if everyone keeps their hands clean. CPE is spread almost entirely by physical contact with CPE bug on someone's hand or surface in the home e.g. toilet seat not through droplets in the air like most bugs. Coughing and sneezing are very unlikely to be important in spread of CPE. CPE usually lives in the gut and come as millions of microscopic cells in faeces and can get onto pretty much any surface through contact with hands. Sharing drinks or food involves contact and may have a risk of spreading CPE. Always wash your hands before eating or preparing food. Good hand hygiene is the key to reducing the spread of any bug or virus.

You do not have to be afraid to shake hands or hug people. Even if family or friends (including children) pick up CPE there is very little chance it will make them sick if they are in good general health. If you have family or friends who are frail or have some serious disease, then there is a little bit more risk if they catch CPE. It is important for you and them to be as careful as you can about keeping hands clean and keeping the toilet clean.

I need help when using the toilet; are my family or carers at risk?

If you have friends or family who help you with very personal things like going to the toilet, changing a stoma bag or if they have very close contact with you in other ways then there is probably more chance that that can pick up CPE. You can talk to someone at the hospital or your GP to show them how to wash or clean their hands to hand hygiene standards and take any other

extra care that will help to stop them picking up CPE. They may want to use gloves and an apron if they are going to be in contact with your poo. There is a World Health Organisation video showing correct hand hygiene technique (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vYwypSLiaTU>)

When I go home can my grandchildren come to see me?

Yes; the risk of spread of CPE to grandchildren who come for a visit is small. It is even smaller if everyone carries out hand hygiene/washes their hands properly after going to the toilet and before they eat. It is a good idea to make sure the toilet is flushed with the lid down and the toilet seat is wiped with disinfectant after you use it. There is no need to put disinfectant into the toilet bowl.

People will not usually put their hands down there and putting a lot of disinfectant into the toilet bowl is a waste of money and can harm the environment. There is no need to have separate dishes, glasses or cutlery when you return home. You can wash your clothing as normal, nothing extra is required. If you have more than one toilet in your house you could decide to keep a separate toilet for your use only to reduce the risk of spread even further.

Should my family members get tested for CPE?

It is possible to get tested for CPE but it is not recommended as there is nothing useful to do with the result of the test. If it is positive there is no treatment to clear CPE and if it is negative it may not mean very much as a person needs multiple tests. It would take at least 4 tests with a minimum of 1 week between each test to be confident that they do not have CPE at a particular point in time.

Carrying CPE in the gut does not make people sick. There is no treatment for clearing it but it may go away on its own. So if you find out that you are carrying CPE it may cause worry about it but there is nothing to do about it. Provided you follow standard good practice hand hygiene there is no reason to believe that you are putting family members or contacts at risk. Hospital staff who work regularly with patients with CPE and even with laboratory cultures of CPE do not get tested. The focus is always on standard good hand hygiene practice.

Is there a way of reducing the risk of spreading CPE when I am out in public?

Again good hand hygiene using with soap and water or alcohol gel is the key way to reduce the risk of spreading CPE. You can carry some alcohol gel with you in case you don't have access to soap and water. Try not to use antibacterial soaps as they contribute to the growing problem of antimicrobial resistance which is affecting our ability to use antibiotics. If you use public toilets make sure the toilet is clean when you leave it and wash your hands thoroughly before leaving the toilet.

Do probiotics help to protect against CPE?

We do not know for sure if probiotics help to prevent someone getting CPE or if they help someone who has CPE to get rid of it. Products such as probiotics yogurts from reputable suppliers are unlikely to do harm and there is some evidence that they may reduce the risk of diarrhoea in some patients taking antibiotics.

What should I tell people about CPE?

Anytime you have to go to the doctor, the clinic or the hospital you should tell them when you make the appointment and again when you arrive, that you carry CPE. This helps people to stop the spread of CPE. You can decide if you want to tell family, neighbours and friends that you are carrying CPE but there is no rule that says you need to tell them if you do not want to.

For more information on antimicrobial resistance and healthcare acquired infection or to view CPE guidance check www.hse.ie/hcai