

You can help stop the spread of CRE by keeping your hands clean.

Living With a Carbapenem-resistant Enterobacteriaceae (CRE)

The information will supplement guidelines from your health care provider. Make sure to discuss questions or concerns with your health care provider.

CRE are a group of bacteria that are resistant to most antibiotics. This makes it hard to treat CRE infections.

The Most Important Things to Remember About Living with a CRE

Good personal hygiene is the best way to prevent the spread of a CRE:

- Wash hands frequently and thoroughly with soap and water, for at least 15 seconds.
- Take care of yourself—eat right, exercise, don't smoke and avoid stress.
- Keep skin infections covered.

A Person may be Colonized or Infected with a CRE

- **Colonized** means that the CRE is present on or in the body, but does not cause infection or an illness.
- **Infected** means there are symptoms present. The type of symptoms depends on the location of the infection.

How to Stop a CRE from Spreading

CRE is spread by direct contact with people who have CRE or touching items used by them, such as toilets, bed rails, and commodes.

The number one way to prevent the spread of CRE is by frequent handwashing. Use your own towel or a paper towel to dry hands. Hands should be washed before preparing food, eating or drinking. Also wash your hands before and after:

- Touching the eyes, nose, mouth, genitals, sores, acne, boils, or rashes
- Blowing your nose
- Smoking
- Using the bathroom
- Changing bandages
- Coughing or sneezing

It is important to wash your hands after:

- Touching urine, feces, and body fluids—this includes items soiled with body fluids, such as bedding.
- Cleaning the bathroom, changing bedding, and doing laundry.
- Touching items other people will use, such as phones, door knobs or shopping carts.

Also be sure to:

- Carry hand sanitizer in case soap and water are not available.
- Keep fingernails short to keep the bacteria from growing under and on nails.
- Avoid touching or squeezing sores.
- Cover nose and mouth when sneezing or coughing.
- Dispose of tissues after each use.
- Clean cuts or scrapes with soap and water and cover with a bandage. Seek medical care if there is redness, swelling, pain or pus.
- Bathe or shower with soap daily and after playing sports or working out. This will help reduce the amount of skin bacteria.
- Avoid sharing towels, razors, toothbrushes or other personal items.
- Change clothes daily and wash before wearing again.
- Wash sheets and towels on a routine basis.
- Avoid contact sports, public gyms, saunas, hot tubs or pools, manicures, pedicures or massages until sores have healed.
- Thoroughly clean the bathroom if the CRE is in urine or feces. People handling urine or feces should wear gloves and wash hands afterwards.

Special Precautions to Take When Going to a Clinic or Hospital if You Have a CRE

- Ask your health care providers to wash their hands before and after caring for you.
- If you have ever had an active CRE infection, or if you are colonized, tell your health care providers.
- If you are in a health care facility, you may be placed on isolation precautions. Staff may wear gowns, gloves and/or masks to care for you.
- Visitors should report to the nurses' station for directions on what to do to enter your room.

How to Clean Your House

CRE bacteria can live on surfaces for days, weeks and months. It is important to clean often with a disinfectant. Pay attention to items that are used often, such as light switches, doorknobs, phones, toilets (including the handle), sinks, tubs, faucet handles, kitchen counters, appliance handles, cell phones, pagers and computer keyboards.

Disinfectants to use:

- Use any cleaner you can buy at the grocery store that has the word “disinfectant” on it. Be sure to read the label and follow the directions.
- You can also make your own disinfectant. Mix one tablespoon bleach into one quart of water in a spray bottle and label it “bleach solution.” Make fresh solution each time you plan to clean because the bleach evaporates out of the water making it less effective. Never mix bleach with other cleaners, especially ammonia. Keep the bleach solution away from children and do not put it in bottles that could be mistaken for something to drink.

Resources

- Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC)
<http://www.cdc.gov>
- Your local health department.

Northwestern Medicine – Health Information Resources

For more information, contact Northwestern Memorial Hospital’s Alberto Culver Health Learning Center (HLC) at hlc@nm.org, or by calling 312.926.5465. You may also visit the HLC on the 3rd floor, Galter Pavilion at 251 E. Huron St., Chicago, IL. Health information professionals can help you find the information you need and provide you with personal support at no charge.

For more information about Northwestern Medicine, please visit our website at nm.org.

Para asistencia en español, por favor llamar al Departamento de Representantes para Pacientes al 312.926.3112.

The entities that come together as Northwestern Medicine are committed to representing the communities we serve, fostering a culture of inclusion, delivering culturally competent care, providing access to treatment and programs in a nondiscriminatory manner and eliminating healthcare disparities. For questions, please call either Northwestern Memorial Hospital’s Patient Representatives Department at 312.926.3112, TDD/TTY 312.926.6363, the Northwestern Lake Forest Patient Relations manager at 847.535.8282 and/or the Northwestern Medical Group Patient Representatives Department at 312.695.1100, TDD/TTY 312.926.6363.

Developed by: NMH Department of Infection Control and Prevention