

INFORMATION AND FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS FOR PATIENTS WITH CARBAPENEMASE (CAR-BA-PEN-EM-ASE) RESISTANCE GENES

What is a resistance gene?

It is a tool that some germs, such as bacteria, use to defend themselves against specific antibiotics. Resistance genes are carried inside the germ and can be easily passed to other germs. These germs use their resistance genes to produce a defense mechanism that gives them protection from antibiotics, making it hard to treat an illness when a patient develops an infection.

Will germs with resistance genes always cause you to feel sick?

Two things can occur when germs carrying resistance genes come into contact with someone who is vulnerable: infection and/or colonization. “Infection” means that you have symptoms, such as fever, diarrhea, or fatigue, which may require treatment.

“Colonization” means that you have the germ in and/or on your body, but that germ does not make you feel sick. In addition, you will not need any medicine or treatment. When a germ colonizes your body, you can still get other people sick, or you may even become sick in the future. You are most at risk of becoming sick in the future if you are staying in a health care facility, if you have wounds, had a recent surgery, have recently taken antibiotics for a long time, or have medical devices like tubes and catheters going into your body.

Why is it important to know if you have a germ with a resistance gene?

Individuals that carry these germs on their skin and in their body can spread these germs to other at-risk patients and to the environment. At this time, there is no known way to remove the germ once a person is colonized. Therefore, it is very important to know that you carry these germs in order to prevent you from becoming sick, which can be very difficult to treat. Furthermore, patients that become sick with these germs also remain colonized and are at risk of getting sick in the future.

How will knowing that you have a germ with a resistance gene impact your health care stay?

While you are receiving medical care, your health care providers, caregivers, and visitors should practice good hand hygiene. They should also use gloves and gowns in order to protect you, themselves and other individuals receiving health care. These germs do not always make you sick, but if you carry these germs, you can become sick if the germs move to other areas of your body where they can cause an infection. Practicing good hand hygiene and using gloves and gowns are ways your health care providers can prevent the germs from spreading to your other body sites and to prevent these germs from spreading to other vulnerable patients.

How will a germ with a resistance gene impact your home life?

When you are not in a health care facility, it is not recommended for family or household members to use gloves and gowns or to stop having physical contact with you. You and your family or household members should perform good hand washing practices, such as after you use the bathroom and after direct contact with wounds or body fluids, such as blood, stool, urine, and vomit. Lastly, you and your household members can prevent getting sick from any germs through good personal hygiene, such as regularly washing the body and hair with soap/shampoo and water.

If you receive any home health care services (like a visiting nurse), it is important to let your home health care workers or aides know that you have a germ with a resistance gene. They can take action to prevent spreading it by cleaning their hands and wearing a gown and gloves as needed. They will also need to clean and disinfect any reusable equipment that was used during care.

Will you give this germ to your family and household members?

It is unlikely that you would give this germ to your household members as healthy people are not likely to get these germs. These germs tend to impact at-risk individuals, such as those with long health care stays, admissions to an intensive care unit, wounds, medical devices like tubes and catheters going into their body, exposure to a long course of antibiotics, or a recent organ transplant.

How long will you have this germ with a resistance gene?

We do not know exactly how long people have or “carry” germs with resistance genes. Many people that continue to require challenging medical care provided within nursing homes and other inpatient health care facilities continue to carry these germs for years. For this reason, it is important to let any of your health care providers and facilities know about the resistance gene identified so the appropriate steps can be put in place to prevent spreading it to others.

Do you need treatment?

Your health care provider will tell you if you need treatment. If the germs are not making you sick, you should not need treatment. Taking medications when they are not needed could make the problem worse and increase the time that you carry these germs.