Carbapenem-Resistant Enterobacteriaceae (CRE) are a family of bacteria that is very difficult to treat, if at all, due to their high levels of resistance to antibiotics (including carbapenem antibiotics). Klebsiella species and Escherichia coli (E. coli) are examples of Enterobacteriaceae, a normal bacteria found in the human gut, that can become carbapenem-resistant.

CRE pose a problem when they spread outside of the gut and cause serious infections such as pneumonia or bloodstream, wound, and urinary tract infections. Because some CRE bacteria have become resistant to most available antibiotics, infections can be very difficult to treat and can even be deadly.

Individuals at risk for CRE are often immunocompromised and/or patients in the healthcare setting; especially those who have invasive devices or are taking certain antibiotics. Healthy people do not usually get CRE infections.

CRE are spread from person to person through contact with individuals who are infected or colonized (have the bacteria on or in their body, but do not have symptoms) with CRE – particularly contact with wounds or stool.

CRE treatment decisions will be made by your doctor on a case-by-case basis after it has been determined through lab tests which antibiotics will work best. Doctors have limited antibiotics that will kill this germ. Some individuals have CRE but it does not make them sick, so they do not need treatment — these individuals are colonized.

To avoid getting or spreading CRE follow your doctor’s instructions.

- If your doctor prescribes you antibiotics, take them exactly as instructed. Be sure to finish the full course even if you start to feel better.
- Wash your hands often, and especially —
  - Before eating
  - After coughing or sneezing
  - After using the bathroom
  - After contact with body fluids

You may be placed on “contact precautions”. This is a means of letting all healthcare personnel know that they need to take extra precautions (i.e. gown and gloves) to ensure that they do not get or spread CRE to other patients.

CRE prevention falls on everyone. Expect all of your healthcare providers and caretakers to wash their hands.

For more information contact your doctor or contact the Philadelphia Department of Public Health, Division of Disease Control at 215-685-6740 / www.phila.gov/health