

Carbapenem Resistant *Acinetobacter baumannii* (CRAB)

A drug-resistant germ that spreads in healthcare facilities



What is *Acinetobacter baumannii*?

The germ, *Acinetobacter baumannii* is a type of bacteria that can cause life-threatening infections in patients with serious medical problems in hospitals and nursing homes. When these germs become resistant to strong antibiotics such as carbapenems, they are harder to treat and even more dangerous. Carbapenem resistant *Acinetobacter baumannii* is called CRAB for short.

What is colonization?

Patients can become colonized with CRAB. Colonization means people carry CRAB on their bodies, but don't have any illness symptoms. Colonization with CRAB can last for many months and even years. People who are colonized can still spread the germ to others.

Why is CRAB a problem?

CRAB can spread quickly from person to person in healthcare facilities. CRAB can spread on the hands of healthcare workers, healthcare equipment, and surfaces. CRAB infections can be difficult to treat and even cause death.

Who is more likely to get CRAB?

CRAB mainly affects patients who have long-term, serious medical problems. People who have spent a lot of time in healthcare facilities are at the highest risk of becoming colonized or developing an infection with CRAB. Other things that increase the risk of CRAB infection include:

- Being on a mechanical ventilator (breathing machine) for a long time.
- Having tubes going into the body, such as urinary catheters, central venous catheters, and feeding or breathing tubes.

How does CRAB spread to patients?

Patients with infection or colonization with CRAB can have the germs on their skin and in body fluids that can contaminate their living space, clothing, and medical equipment. CRAB can contaminate healthcare workers' hands, clothing, and other items in the healthcare environment – like doorknobs, bed rails, stethoscopes, blood pressure cuffs, and thermometers—and can quickly spread to other patients.

How can we prevent the spread of CRAB?

In order to prevent spread of CRAB in healthcare facilities, healthcare workers should:

- Know how germs spread and make sure they do not carry them to other patients on their clothing, hands, or equipment.

- Wash or sanitize hands before and after caring for patients or touching items in the patient’s room.
- Use the right personal protective equipment when caring for patients who can spread infections – often this includes gowns and gloves.
- Use hospital grade disinfectants for disinfecting areas and items that might have CRAB germs on them and make sure that environmental services staff know how to correctly use these products.
- Clean and disinfect shared equipment before and after use on a patient.

In order to prevent spread of CRAB in the home:

- Clean hands with soap and warm water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer before eating or preparing food, after using the toilet, after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing, and before and after changing wound dressings or bandages. This is good advice for everyone.
- Make sure your caregivers clean their hands before and after they care for you including after contact with wounds, helping you use the bathroom, after cleaning up stool, and before and after handling medical devices (e.g., urinary catheters). Gloves should be used for possible contact with body fluids or blood. Always clean hands after removing gloves.

Who Should be Tested for CRAB?

Public Health recommends testing patients for CRAB if they may have been exposed to another person with CRAB infection or colonization. The testing is to see if they have the CRAB germ on their body.

Should healthcare workers and family members be tested to see if they have CRAB?

Public Health does not recommend testing healthy family members or healthcare workers who care for patients with CRAB infection or colonization. In general, healthy people are not at risk from CRAB and do not need to be tested.



DOH 420-501 April 2024

To request this document in another format, call 1-800-525-0127. Deaf or hard of hearing customers, please call 711 ([Washington Relay](#)) or email doh.information@doh.wa.gov.