The AMR Global Health Academy

AMR in Practice #8: Decision Point
"Screen, Isolate, or Wait?"

Learning Pathway:
Healthcare-Associated Infections & Infection Prevention and Control (IPC)

The Scenario

A 68-year-old patient is transferred to a hospital medical ward after a prolonged admission at another healthcare facility. The transfer notes indicate that a previous rectal screening sample was positive for carbapenem-resistant Enterobacterales (CRE), but no follow-up results are available.

The patient is clinically stable, has no signs of active infection, and requires assistance with daily care. The receiving ward has shared rooms and limited single-room capacity. The clinical team must decide which infection prevention measures to initiate while confirming the patient's current colonization status.

The Decision Point

Would you initiate contact precautions immediately, obtain repeat screening first, or wait unless the patient develops symptoms?

How To Think It Through

Colonization with a multidrug-resistant organism does not necessarily mean that a patient has an active infection. However, patients carrying resistant organisms may still contribute to transmission in healthcare settings.

The team should assess the patient's documented CRE history, the reliability of the transfer information, the ward's transmission risks, and applicable national and facility IPC guidance. Appropriate precautions should not depend on the patient developing symptoms. Repeat screening may inform subsequent decisions, but a negative result does not automatically establish that the patient is no longer colonized.

Where single rooms are limited, the IPC team should assess appropriate placement, cohorting where feasible, hand hygiene, environmental cleaning, and staff use of personal protective equipment.

Key Takeaway

A patient with documented CRE colonization may require transmission-based precautions even without signs of infection. Do not delay appropriate IPC measures solely while awaiting repeat screening.

Why This Matters

Resistant organisms can spread through healthcare environments before an infection is recognized.

Timely risk assessment, communication during patient transfers, and appropriate infection prevention measures help protect vulnerable patients while supporting responsible use of limited isolation resources.

Supported by an educational grant from bioMérieux. All content independently developed by the AMR Global Health Academy.