

## Infection Prevention and Control

# Vancomycin-resistant enterococci (VRE)

This information is for patients, relatives, and carers. It explains what vancomycin-resistant enterococci (VRE) is, how it affects you, how it spreads, and what we can do to stop it spreading.

Please discuss any concerns or questions you have with your doctor or nurse. You can request a visit from one of the infection prevention and control nurses.

### What is VRE?

Enterococci are a group of bacteria that are present in the human gut naturally and usually cause no harm. This is known as **colonisation**.

But sometimes enterococci can move into the bloodstream and cause an **infection**.

Some enterococci are resistant to an antibiotic called vancomycin. They're known as vancomycin-resistant enterococci (VRE).

VRE can cause colonisation or infection. VRE are often resistant to other types of antibiotics. This can make infections caused by them more difficult to treat.

VRE will not cause more serious infections than other enterococci. There are several other antibiotics which can be used.



## **Who is at risk of infections caused by VRE?**

Enterococci can be naturally present in some people's gut. It can be hard to identify how people first pick it up. But there is an increased risk for those who:

- have been in hospital for a long time
- have weakened immune systems, are transplant patients, or are in intensive care units
- have undergone surgery involving the abdomen or chest area
- have medical devices put in, such as catheters or drips
- have been treated with antibiotics such as vancomycin before

## **How is VRE spread?**

VRE can be spread by:

- person-to-person contact
- contact with contaminated surfaces
- exposure to the environment (by colonised medical equipment)

Both colonised and infected people can spread the bacteria. It spreads more easily in patients with diarrhoea.

VRE can enter the body through open wounds, catheters and breathing tubes.

## **How can you prevent VRE from spreading?**

**Regular and thorough hand washing is one of the most successful ways to help stop the spread of VRE.**

People with VRE should wash their hands regularly, especially after going to the toilet and before eating.

Healthcare workers should wash their hands when they enter and leave your room or approach your bedside. This will remove the bacteria and stop it spreading to other patients.

## Patient Information

You should not hesitate to discuss with any of the staff caring for you:

- the importance of good hand washing
- the use of gloves when providing direct care or bodily examinations

You may also take further steps to help stop the spread of VRE by:

- avoiding touching medical devices (urinary catheter tube, intravenous drip, where they enter your body or skin)
- letting staff know immediately if you develop diarrhoea
- reminding visitors to wash their hands when entering and leaving your room and bedspace

Healthcare workers may also take further steps to help stop the spread of VRE between patients by:

- moving you to a single room in the hospital
- wearing a gown or apron and gloves if they are providing direct care
- cleaning by domestic staff removes many bacteria that live on surfaces in your hospital room

## How is VRE treated?

Not all patients with VRE need treatment.

Sometimes the bacteria live on the skin or in wounds without causing infection. Medical and nursing staff will monitor you for any signs of infection. Colonised patients are sometimes given treatment to prevent an infection developing.

If you have an infection, it can be difficult to treat due to being resistant to some antibiotics. You will need close monitoring. You may need more testing to make sure the antibiotics you're prescribed will work.

## **How can I protect my family and friends from infection?**

The staff will give your visitors advice on effective hand washing with water and soap when they enter and leave your room/bed space.

It's also important that visitors do not have contact with any wounds or soiled dressings you may have. Exposure to someone with VRE should not harm healthy people. This includes pregnant women, children, and babies.

## **What happens when I get home?**

Please tell the staff that you are colonised with VRE if:

- you're seeing new doctors
- you attend outpatient appointments
- you return to hospital

Washing your hands thoroughly after you leave the hospital is essential. It should be done by everyone else at home, especially after going to the toilet and before preparing food.

Normal household cleaning practices are enough.

You can wash towels, clothes, bed sheets and other items in a domestic washing machine. No special washing temperature is recommended.

You can wash all eating utensils and dishes as usual.

## Where can I get further information?

- Talk to your doctor or nurses caring for you
- The Infection Prevention and Control Team can be contacted on 02476 964791.

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format, please contact 024 7696 5132 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

The Trust operates a smoke-free policy.

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### Document History

Department:	Infection Prevention and Control
Contact:	24791
Updated:	September 2023
Review:	September 2025
Version:	2
Reference:	HIC/LFT/2338/18