

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 us, how it spreads and what we can do to stop it spreading.

If after reading this you have any concerns or further questions please discuss this with the Doctor or Nurse caring for you. You can request a visit from one of the Infection Prevention and Control Nurses.

What is the difference between VRE infection and VRE colonisation?

Infection means that the bacteria are in, or on, the body and are making you sick. Colonisation means you carry the bacteria in, or on, your body but you are not sick, if this is the case your hospital stay should not be increased. Colonised patients are sometimes given treatment to prevent infection developing. Both colonised and infected people can spread the bacteria.

What is VRE?

Enterococci are a group of bacteria (germ) that are naturally present in the intestinal tract (gut) of humans and normally cause no harm (colonisation). However, sometimes enterococci can cause infections in wounds, urine and in more serious infections in blood. Enterococci are also often found in the environment.

VRE are enterococci that are resistant to an antibiotic called Vancomycin.



Patient Information

VRE are often resistant to other types of antibiotics and this can make them more difficult to treat, however there are a number of other antibiotics which can be used. VRE will not cause more serious infections than other enterococci. VRE can cause infection or colonisation.

Who is at risk of infections caused by VRE?

People at an increased risk of acquiring an infection caused by VRE include those who:

- Have been in hospital for a long period of time
- Have weakened immune systems, are transplant patients, or those in intensive care units
- Have undergone surgery involving the abdominal or chest area
- Have medical devices inserted such as catheters or drips
- Have previously been treated with antibiotics such as vancomycin

How can you prevent VRE spreading?

VRE can be spread by person to person contact, contact with contaminated surfaces, or exposure in the environment (by colonised medical equipment).

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

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, particularly after going to the toilet and before eating.

Health care workers treating you should wash their hands each time they enter and leave your room. This will kill and or remove the bacteria and stop it spreading to other patients. You should not hesitate to discuss the importance of good hand washing with any of the staff caring for you.

Patient Information

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 antibiotics. Sometimes the bacteria live on skin or in wounds without causing infection. Medical and nursing staff will monitor you closely for any signs of infection.

If you have an infection, it can be difficult to treat due to being resistant to some antibiotics. For this reason you will require close monitoring and may require more testing to ensure antibiotics you may be prescribed will work for you.

How can I protect my family and friends from infection?

The staff will give your visitors advice about strict hand washing with water and liquid soap when they enter and leave your room. It is also important that they do not have contact with your wounds or soiled bandages. Exposure to someone with VRE should not harm healthy people, including pregnant women, children and babies.

What happens when I get home?

Thorough hand washing is essential for you and everyone else in the home, especially after going to the toilet and before preparing food. Normal household cleaning practices are sufficient. Towels, clothes, bed sheets and other items can be washed in a domestic washing machine. No special washing temperature is recommended. All eating utensils and dishes can be washed as normal. When seeing new doctors or if you return to hospital, it is important to tell health care workers about any previous or current VRE infections or colonisations.

Patient Information

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 02476964791 or extension 24791

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format, please contact 024 7696 4791 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

The Trust operates a smoke free policy.

To give feedback on this leaflet please email feedback@uhcw.nhs.uk

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