

Vancomycin-resistant enterococci (VRE)

Information for Patients

If you have any questions about the information provided in this leaflet, it is very important that you discuss these with a member of the nursing or medical team caring for you.

What are vancomycin-resistant enterococci (VRE)?

Enterococci are bacteria (germs) that commonly live in the bowel of humans without causing any ill effects, this is called colonisation. Enterococci can be resistant to vancomycin (a type of antibiotic) and other antibiotics used to treat infections. When the enterococci are resistant to vancomycin it is referred to as vancomycin-resistant enterococci or VRE for short.

How will I know if I have VRE?

If you need a sample for testing, a member of your care team will discuss this with you. Normally the test involves taking a faecal (poo) sample. Other samples may be required such as urine samples or a wound swab (if you have any wounds).

You should not experience any discomfort while the swabs or samples are taken. Your privacy and dignity will be respected at all times when these samples are taken.

All swabs and samples will be sent to the laboratory for testing to see if any bacteria grow. Your care team will tell you the results (the results can take approximately one to three days).

How did I get VRE?

It can be difficult to say exactly how you got VRE. We do know that VRE is most commonly found in people who have been taking antibiotics or have a weakened immune system, such as patients in intensive care units or people receiving renal dialysis.

What if I test positive for VRE?

If you test positive for VRE it means that you have the bacteria in your body. You may not show any symptoms (colonisation) or you may feel unwell (infection). If your doctor thinks you are showing signs of infection he or she may prescribe a course of antibiotics.

While you are in hospital:

- You may be cared for in a single room with your own toilet facilities.
- Staff caring for you will wear personal protective equipment such as gloves and aprons to prevent spreading the bacteria to other patients.
- It is very important that you wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water after visiting the toilet and before eating (staff will help you if you need them to).
- It is very important that all healthcare staff and your visitors wash their hands with soap and water or use alcohol gel (if hands visibly clean) before entering and leaving your room.

- You should avoid touching medical devices such as intravenous drips or catheters (if you have any). You should avoid touching open wounds (if you have any).

Am I allowed visitors?

VRE are not a problem for fit and healthy people, therefore family and friends can visit you. The general advice is:

- Relatives, friends and other visitors who are feeling unwell should not visit you.
- Visitors who have had a recent infection or illness should seek advice from nursing staff before visiting.
- Children and babies are more prone to infection and are advised not to visit.
- Visitors should follow instructions on your room door or from nursing staff before entering your room
- Visitors and relatives can still touch you (for example, hold your hand or give you a hug).
- Visitors must wash their hands with soap and water or use alcohol based hand rub (only if hands are visibly clean) before entering and on leaving your room. This will help prevent the bacteria from spreading.

What happens when I leave hospital?

- If you are discharged from hospital with a VRE, it should not affect you or your family home.
- Staff from the hospital will tell your GP about your positive VRE result when you are discharged from hospital.
- Hand-washing is very important to prevent these bacteria spreading. So you must wash your hands well after going to the toilet and before eating. Any person who is looking after you must also regularly wash their hands well to prevent spreading VRE to other people.
- Community staff caring for you may wear gloves and aprons when carrying out certain tasks. This is to prevent spreading VRE to other patients they are caring for. It is not necessary for your family members to wear aprons and gloves.
- If you have any invasive medical devices, for example a urinary catheter, you should only touch these if instructed to clean them.
- You should make sure your toilets and bathrooms are regularly cleaned with your usual household cleaning products.
- You can continue with leisure and social activities as normal.
- You can wash crockery and cutlery and so on as normal.
- You can wash clothes and bed linen as normal at the hottest temperature suitable for the fabric. If laundry is soiled, it should be washed separately. If a

friend or relative is helping you with your laundry, it is important that they wash their hands with soap and water after handling the dirty laundry.

What if I need to go back into hospital or go to hospital as an outpatient?

If you are admitted back into hospital or go to hospital as an outpatient, it is important that you let the staff caring for you know that you have had a positive test for VRE in the past. This will make sure that you receive the best care to reduce the risk of you developing a VRE infection. It might be helpful to take this leaflet with you to show the clinical team.

Where can I get more information?

If you would like more information, please speak to a member of the nursing or medical team caring for you, who may contact the local Infection Prevention and Control Team for you.

Please use the space below to write any questions you may have for the care team.