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# Vancomycin Resistant Enterococci (VRE)

## What is vancomycin resistant Enterococci?

Enterococci are generally harmless bacteria (germs), which live in the intestines of most people.

Vancomycin is an antibiotic that is often used to treat very serious infections.

VRE is a bacteria that has become resistant to, and cannot be destroyed by, vancomycin.

## How can you tell if you have an infection?

The only way you can tell if you have VRE is if your doctor orders a sample of your blood, urine or faeces to be sent to a laboratory for testing.

## What is the difference between infection and colonisation?

VRE can cause infection or colonisation.

Infection means that bacteria are in, or on, the body and are making you sick.

Colonisation means you have the bacteria in, or on, your body but you are not sick because of it and your hospital stay should not be increased. Colonised patients are sometimes given treatment to prevent infection developing.

Occasionally, people who are colonised with VRE may have their surgery postponed or be moved to a single room in the hospital. This is because both colonised and infected people can spread the bacteria to other patients.

## Am I likely to get a VRE infection?

VRE infections are rare.

Patients most at risk of getting VRE are those who have:

- been in an intensive care unit
- long term illnesses
- been on many different types of antibiotics
- had major surgery or are being treated for conditions such as cancer or severe kidney disease
- had an organ transplant
- been treated with Vancomycin in the past.

## How is VRE spread between patients?

The most common way VRE can be spread is touching someone who is colonised or infected. Touching a surface, such as a hospital bed or table, that has the bacteria on it can also spread VRE.

## 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, particularly after going to the toilet.

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

Health 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 and wearing a gown or apron and gloves if they are providing direct care.

Cleaning by housekeeping staff removes many bacteria that live on surfaces in your hospital room.

## How is VRE infection treated?

VRE is often resistant to commonly prescribed antibiotics. Patients with a VRE infection may need to be cared for by a specialist doctor so they get the right treatment and antibiotics.

Your doctor may order regular laboratory tests to check if you continue to have VRE during and after treatment.

## 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 they do not have any contact with your wounds or soiled bandages.

A person who is colonised or infected with VRE is not a risk to 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. Normal household cleaning practices are sufficient. Towels, clothes, bed sheets and other items that might have pus or VRE on them 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 workers about any previous or current VRE infections or colonisations.

## Where can I get more information?

Talk to your doctor or the nurses caring for you.