

Vancomycin Resistant Enterococci (VRE)

Information and advice for patients

Infection Prevention and Control

What is VRE?

Vancomycin Resistant Enterococci (VRE) are bacteria that live in the bowel and that cannot be treated by certain antibiotics, such as Vancomycin.

Can VRE be harmful?

For most patients, VRE lives harmlessly in the bowel and does not cause infection. However, sometimes VRE can cause infection in patients, for example when they need intensive care or while receiving chemotherapy. Antibiotics are needed to treat VRE infection. VRE can cause infections, such as kidney, wound or in severe cases, blood infections, kidney infections, wound infections. If a patient is more vulnerable to infection and the infection is caused by VRE, it can be difficult to treat, because many of the commonly used antibiotics will not work against VRE. Doctors need to know as soon as possible if a patient is carrying VRE so that the most effective antibiotics can be chosen to treat the infection.

How do people get VRE?

Patients who have already taken lots of antibiotics are more at risk of picking up VRE. The reason for this is that the bugs are more exposed to antibiotics, and are therefore more likely to develop 'resistance' to that antibiotic, so that the antibiotic no longer works.

VRE can be carried by patients, healthcare staff or visitors, either harmlessly or if they are infected with it. It can spread between patients through direct contact with each other or by touching items or surfaces that the person with VRE may have touched, such as bed rails, toilets or equipment. As patients in hospital are much more vulnerable to infection than patients in their own homes, special precautions are required to prevent the spread of VRE between patients in hospital.

What are the special precautions for patients with VRE?

Special precautions have been designed to prevent VRE spreading between patients on the ward. If you have a positive test result for VRE, a careful check will be carried out to decide if you need to be cared for in an isolation room with your own toilet or commode. If VRE is picked up in a wound swab or from urine taken from a urinary catheter or if you have diarrhoea, you may be cared for in an isolation room.

VRE does not cause diarrhoea but because it lives in the bowel, it could spread more easily if you are suffering with diarrhoea. Staff will wear gloves and aprons before coming into contact with you, to protect their hands and clothes from VRE. Patients, staff and visitors must pay special attention to hand hygiene. All staff must clean their hands before and after any contact

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with every patient, regardless of whether or not they have VRE. If visitors are helping out with your physical care, nursing staff will advise if extra precautions are required, such as wearing gloves and aprons.

How can I help?

If you go to the surgery, another clinic, hospital or nursing home, let them know you have tested positive for VRE. They can then take special precautions to stop the infection spreading to other patients who may be more prone.

What happens when I'm ready to leave hospital?

You can go home as soon as your doctor says you are ready, even if you have the infection as carrying VRE will not affect your discharge. If you are going to another hospital or nursing home, your nurse or doctor will let them know about your positive VRE result so that they can take measures to prevent it spreading to other patients.

What happens when I go home?

There is no need to take special precautions at home. People in the community are usually fit and healthy so they are less likely than hospital patients to pick up VRE. Clothes, bed linen and dishes can be washed as usual. It is always very important to wash your hands carefully after using the toilet and before preparing meals or eating to stop bugs spreading to other people. Clean hands protect you and others from lots of infections, not just VRE.

Will I get rid of VRE?

Your body may clear VRE from the bowel as you recover, but this is not always the case, they may remain in the bowel for some time. Taking antibiotics can encourage the infection to grow in the bowel again, so they should only be taken for a very good reason. Antibiotics are available to treat VRE infection but they will not clear VRE from the bowel.

Please do not hesitate to ask the nursing or medical staff caring for you if you have any questions or if you require more information about VRE.

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Contact details

If you have any questions or concerns please speak to the doctor looking after you, your GP or the hospital. You can contact the Infection Prevention and Control team on 0121 554 3801 (ask for Infection Prevention and Control Service).

Or alternatively, please write to us at:

Infection Prevention and Control Team

City Hospital
Dudley Road
Birmingham
B18 7QH

Further information

More information can be found on the website of Public Health England:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/public-health-england>.

For more information about our hospitals and services please see our website

www.swbh.nhs.uk, follow us on Twitter @SWBHnhs and like us on Facebook

www.facebook.com/SWBHnhs.

Sources used for the information in this leaflet

Public Health England (2008) *Enterococcus species and glycopeptide-resistant enterococci (GRE)*.

Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/enterococcus-species-and-glycopeptide-resistant-enterococci-gre> (Accessed 30 January 2023).

If you would like to suggest any amendments or improvements to this leaflet please contact SWB Library Services on ext 3587 or email swbh.library@nhs.net.



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