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VRE information leaflet  
for patients

# VRE

## Vancomycin Resistant Enterococci

### What is VRE?

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

### 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 infections, wound infections or in severe cases, blood infection. 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 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 done 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 may be 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 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 doctor, another clinic, hospital or nursing home, let them know you have had a positive VRE result. They can then take special precautions to stop VRE spreading to other patients who might be more prone to getting a VRE infection.

### 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 VRE. 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, and it may remain in the bowel for some time. Taking antibiotics can encourage VRE 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.