

What is Vancomycin Resistant Enterococci (VRE)?

DRAFT

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What is VRE?

VRE stands for Vancomycin Resistant Enterococci. Enterococci are bacteria that live in the gut of most healthy people. VRE are a less common type of the same bacteria. They have become resistant to an antibiotic called Vancomycin, and may also be resistant to other commonly used antibiotics.

How did I get it?

There are a number of ways that VRE can be acquired:

- You may have acquired it naturally.
- You may have previously had Vancomycin. Use of Vancomycin and other antibiotics can sometimes cause VRE to develop.
- It can be transmitted to patients in hospital by direct or indirect contact with another patient.

How will VRE affect me?

The vast majority of patients with VRE carry it in or on their bodies without any problems. VRE often cause no illness, living harmlessly in the bowel. VRE sometimes causes urinary infections and may also occasionally cause bacteraemia (blood poisoning), infections of the abdomen and pelvis, infections in the bile duct (cholangitis) or heart valves.

If an infection caused by VRE has been identified, your doctors will prescribe you specific antibiotic treatment for this.

Are some people more at risk than others?

Infections caused by VRE mainly occur in hospital patients, particularly those whose immune systems are compromised, those who have had previous treatment with certain other antibiotics, those who have been in hospital a long time and those in specialist units such as intensive care or renal units. However, VRE are sometimes found in the faeces of people who have never been in hospital or have not recently been given antibiotics.

How can the spread be controlled?

Prompt recognition of bacteria with unusual resistances to certain antibiotics and good infection control procedures are needed to prevent spread. VRE is most commonly spread via hands, equipment and sometimes the environment. It is important that healthcare workers and visitors clean their hands before and after visiting a patient. If someone's hands are soiled, they should be washed with soap and water, otherwise alcohol hand gel can be used. It is important that you wash your hands after going to the toilet and before eating.

Will I be isolated?

It is likely that you will be cared for in a single room. The staff looking after you will wear gloves and aprons for any procedures and significant contact. This is to reduce the risk of staff spreading VRE to other vulnerable or sick patients. However, you may mobilise out of your room, preferably off the ward if your condition allows. If you wish to use the ward's bathroom or shower room, please just let your nurse know.

Is there any risk to my visitors?

VRE does not pose a risk to your visitors, including children or pregnant women. If any of your visitors are seeing other patients, it is a good idea that they visit you last. We encourage all visitors to routinely clean their hands with alcohol hand gel or soap and water after visiting any patient in isolation.

Will I always carry VRE?

This will depend on where we have found the bacteria. If it is in the gut, it may remain there for months or even years. In some cases, VRE tests may be negative after treatment.

What happens when I go home?

As the general population is not at risk from VRE infection, there is no need for any special precautions. If you are readmitted to hospital, please tell staff you have had VRE. You may need to be cared for in a single room again, and further specimens may be required to see if you are still carrying it.

Further information

If you have any questions that we have not answered in this leaflet, please ask your nurse or doctor caring for you on the ward or contact one of the Infection Control nurses.

For Eastern services, call 01392402355

For Northern services, call 01271 322680

PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) ensures that the NHS listens to patients, relatives, carers and friends, answers questions and resolves concerns as quickly as possible. If you have a query or concern, please contact:

PALS Mid Devon, East Devon and Exeter

- call 01392 402093 or email rduh.pals-eastern@nhs.net. You can also visit the PALS and Information Centre in person at the Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital in Wonford, Exeter.

PALS North Devon

- call 01271 314090 or email rduh.pals-northern@nhs.net. You can also visit the PALS and Information Centre in person at the North Devon District Hospital in Barnstaple.

Have your say

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