VRE

We have written this factsheet to give you more information about VRE. It explains what VRE is, how it is treated, and how to prevent it from spreading during your stay in hospital and at home. We hope it will help to answer some of the questions you may have. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to a member of your healthcare team.

What is VRE?

VRE stands for vancomycin-resistant enterococci. Enterococci are bacteria that usually live harmlessly in the human bowel and in the female genital tract and do not cause infections. (This is known as 'colonisation'.) However, sometimes these bacteria cause infection if they get into an area of your body where they are not normally found, such as your urinary tract, bile duct, heart valves, wounds or bloodstream.

Bacteria are finding new ways to avoid the effects of the antibiotics used to treat the infections they cause. Antibiotic resistance occurs when the bacteria no longer respond to the antibiotics designed to kill them. If these bacteria develop resistance to vancomycin (an antibiotic that is often used to treat infections), they become vancomycin-resistant enterococci (VRE). This antibiotic resistance means there are fewer effective antibiotics we can use to treat the infection.

How is VRE spread?

As with other bacteria, VRE can be spread directly from one person to another through:

- touching hands with an infected or colonised person
- touching items or surfaces that a person with VRE may have touched

VRE may also spread more easily if you are suffering with diarrhoea, so it is very important that you wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water after using the toilet.

Healthcare staff and visitors can also carry VRE on them without causing any infection.

Who is at risk?

You are more likely to become infected with VRE if:

- you have a weakened immune system
- you have an existing infection
- you have been previously treated with antibiotics, including vancomycin, for long periods of time
- you have had a prolonged stay in hospital
- you have a urinary catheter or intravenous cannula (a small tube inserted into a vein)
- you have undergone surgical procedures

What are the symptoms?

The most common symptoms of a VRE infection include:

- a fever
- feeling unwell
- a fast heart rate (pulse)
- redness, swelling, pain or heat at a specific site

How will I be treated?

We do not usually test for VRE when you come into hospital, as it can live in your body without causing problems. However, we may detect it when we perform other routine tests while you are in hospital.

If you do have an infection, it can be treated. We will prescribe you appropriate antibiotics if required. If you are carrying VRE without any signs of infection (colonisation), you will not need any treatment.

How will I be cared for in hospital?

If we find that you have VRE or you have an infection caused by VRE, we will take additional precautions to reduce the risk of it spreading to other people.

We will:

- carry out a risk assessment to determine whether you should be moved to a single occupancy room (isolation) for the duration of your hospital stay
- place a sign on the entrance door to your room to inform staff and visitors of any additional precautions required
- wear a plastic apron and gloves, and sometimes a mask and goggles, if we are providing any close care
- clean the room daily with a chlorine-based disinfectant (personal items should be kept to a minimum and stored in the drawers or cupboard provided to keep surfaces clear)
- clean any equipment that we take into your room with chlorine after each use and we may leave other equipment in your room for the duration of your hospital stay
- provide you with your own commode (a chair with a hidden toilet) to use (if your isolation room is not en-suite)

When you are in isolation you should:

- not leave your room (unless we ask you to come for an investigation)
- not visit ward or hospital communal areas (including the cafeteria and the shops on C level)
- not visit other patients' bed areas or have contact with other patients
- not touch any wounds or medical devices (for example, urinary catheters or intravenous cannulas)
- always wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water before meals and after going to the toilet (ask us for help if needed)

Can I have visitors?

Family and friends are welcome to visit you in hospital. To prevent the spread of VRE, visitors must:

- clean their hands with alcohol gel hand rub or soap and water on entering and exiting your room
- not sit or lie on your bed
- not assist or visit other patients
- not use patient toilets
- wear gloves and an apron (if helping with personal care)

What will happen when I go home?

You can carry on with your usual day-to-day activities (including visiting others or having visitors). You should maintain good personal hygiene, including washing your hands after going to the toilet, and before and after touching your wound or touching your catheter (if present).

Contact your general practitioner (GP) if you have a wound that becomes red, swollen or starts to ooze.

We recommend that:

- everyone who helps you with your personal hygiene or toileting should wash their hands afterwards
- you clean your hands after using the toilet, and before food preparation and eating (this will protect you and others from lots of infections, not just VRE)
- you do not share personal items that touch your skin, such as towels

You can continue to wash your clothes and bedding as normal with the rest of your household laundry.

Will VRE go away?

VRE will usually disappear from the infected areas (with or without antibiotics). However, as enterococci normally live in the bowel, you may remain a VRE carrier without experiencing any future problems.

Do I need to tell anyone I have VRE?

You should tell anyone who provides you with care, such as your GP, a district nurse, a hospital nurse and a doctor, that you have had a VRE infection.

Further information

If you have any questions or concerns, please speak to a member of the nursing or medical team caring for you.

If you are a patient at one of our hospitals and need this document translated, or in another format such as easy read, large print, Braille or audio, please telephone **0800 484 0135** or email **PFSH@uhs.nhs.uk**

For help preparing for your visit, arranging an interpreter or accessing the hospital, please visit **www.uhs.nhs.uk/additionalsupport**

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