Vancomycin - resistant Enterococci (VRE)

Infection Prevention

Information for patients

What is VRE?

Enterococci are bacteria found in the bowel (intestines) of many people and animals. They are usually harmless. The presence of enterococci bacteria in the bowel is normal. This is also known as ‘colonisation’.

Occasionally, enterococci find their way into parts of the body where they don’t belong (for example, the bladder). This can cause an infection.

Vancomycin is an antibiotic sometimes used in hospitals to treat serious infections, including those caused by enterococci. Some enterococci bacteria have now become resistant to vancomycin. This means the antibiotic cannot kill them. These are known as vancomycin-resistant enterococci, or VRE.

There are many different types (or strains) of VRE. Occasionally, some of these strains are also very resistant to other antibiotics.

If you have VRE, it does not necessarily mean you have an infection - you may simply be colonised.

What if I have a VRE infection?

We can treat patients who have infections caused by VRE with specialised antibiotics.

Who is at risk of infection with VRE?

Patients who have:

- Weakened immune systems, such as those in intensive care, have cancer, or who have had organ transplants
- Had major surgery or are being treated for a chronic disease
- Urinary catheters or intravenous lines into their bloodstream
- Spent a long time in hospital
- Had a lot of antibiotics.

How do you get VRE?

Some people can develop VRE after taking certain types of antibiotics. This means that the enterococci in their bowel have developed a resistance to some antibiotics over time.

VRE can also spread from person to person via contaminated hands, or from contact with surfaces or equipment contaminated with VRE.
How can we stop the spread of VRE?

**Hand Hygiene:** It’s very important that staff, patients and visitors clean their hands every time they enter or leave your room. To clean their hands, they should use the provided alcohol-based hand rub, or soap and water.

**It’s OK to ask:** Please feel free to remind your doctor, nurse or other health care worker about cleaning their hands

**Cleaning:** Cleaning medical equipment between patient use and keeping the hospital clean is very important.

**Accommodation:** In most cases, there will be no changes to how you are cared for in hospital.

Occasionally, you may be given a single room. This may happen if you have a very resistant strain of VRE or if you are staying on a ward with lots of patients who have weak immune systems and you have diarrhoea. In both of these situations, staff will wear gloves and gowns when caring for you.

This is to reduce the risk of spreading VRE to other patients they are caring for.

**How long will I carry VRE for?**

We know that some people can carry VRE in their bowel harmlessly for weeks, months and maybe years. It is important to tell your doctors and nurses if you have had VRE in the past.

**Are my family and friends at risk?**

No. People in good health are not at risk from VRE. Normal contact, including kissing, is fine.

Visitors should always clean their hands before and after entering your room. This is to help protect you from other infections.

**What happens when I go home from hospital?**

In most cases, if you are having visits from a home nurse or other health care worker, there will be no changes in the way you are cared for.