

# Vancomycin- Resistant Enterococcus

**Vancomycin-resistant enterococcus (VRE) is a type of bacterium (or germ) that is commonly found in gastrointestinal tract (gut or bowel) and in the genital area.**

In the majority of people the germ is harmless, but in some people it can cause infection in the urinary tract, a wound of the bloodstream.

Enterococcus is the name of the germ and vancomycin is the name of the antibiotic. Vancomycin is an important antibiotic used to treat serious infections. Vancomycin-resistant means the enterococcus germ has become resistant to the antibiotic. Therefore, Vancomycin can't be given to treat the infection.

Vancomycin-resistant enterococcus bacteria are sometimes also called Glycopeptide-resistant enterococcus (**GRE**).

## Who gets VRE?

**You can catch VRE at home or in hospital but you are likely to get it if you:**

- Have a serious illness that harms the body's ability to fight infection
- Are in hospital for a long time
- Have been taking antibiotics for a long time, including vancomycin, or have had multiple courses of antibiotics
- Have had medical devices such as urinary or intravenous catheters, which have stayed in for a long time
- Have had Surgery, such as abdominal or chest surgery

## How does it spread?

You can have VRE for weeks or months in your gut (bowel) or skin without becoming unwell. This is called VRE colonisation. You won't have any symptoms but you can pass the germ to other people.

## Are there any treatments?

Treatment is not normally necessary; however, if you have VRE you may be given a skin wash to use daily during your stay on our inpatient wards. This reduces the amount of VRE on the skin.

If you develop an infection or need to have an operation, doctors will prescribe appropriate antibiotic treatment.

## Do hospitals take special precautions?

Yes, hospitals use special precautions to help prevent the spread of VRE.

You may be cared for in a single room. In some circumstances it may be possible to care for you in an open bay.

We will wear gloves and aprons when providing physical care for you. Hands must be washed with soap and water or hand sanitiser before entering and leaving your room.

Your treatment in hospital can carry on as usual; you can go for any tests, physiotherapy and occupational therapy that you need in other departments.

## Are my visitors at risk of catching VRE?

VRE does not normally affect healthy individuals. Your visitors will be asked to wash their hands with soap and water or use the hand sanitiser before entering and leaving your room.

## Will I have to stay in hospital longer because I have VRE?

Having VRE should not delay your discharge from hospital. If as part of your treatment you need to be transferred to another ward or hospital, there may be some delay if you need a single room as this may take a little time to organise.

When you are discharged you can return to your normal routine. Laundry and dishes can be washed as usual and no special cleaning is required.

The hospital doctors will tell your GP that you have had VRE. If in future you receive care from nurses, doctors or therapists or are readmitted to hospital it is important to tell them that you have had VRE. The fact that you have had VRE will be recorded in your medical notes and electronic patient record.

## Further Information

For general information about infection prevention and control refer to: [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

Alternatively you can contact the **Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)**, who can listen to your concerns, suggestions or queries and direct you to further information. They can be contacted on **01189 605027** or [bht@berkshire.nhs.uk](mailto:bht@berkshire.nhs.uk)

## How to contact us

If you need to contact us or require further information...

**Infection Prevention and Control Team**

Phone: **01189 605140**

[www.berkshirehealthcare.nhs.uk](http://www.berkshirehealthcare.nhs.uk)

