

# Vancomycin Resistant Enterococci (VRE)

Information for patients, staff  
and relatives



## What is VRE?

VRE stands for Vancomycin (V) Resistant (R) Enterococci (E). Enterococci are bacteria that are commonly found in the bowels of most humans and under normal circumstances cause no problems. VRE does not respond to the common antibiotics. However, there are a small number of antibiotics that may be used if infections develop.

## How do people contract VRE?

It is not fully understood how some people contract VRE. One possibility is that use of certain antibiotics in the past may have changed the germs that normally live in the bowel and have supported the growth of VRE. This can happen if you do not fully complete a course of antibiotics. Another way in which people may contract VRE is when it is passed from one person who has VRE to another who also becomes colonised (sometimes known as a carrier of VRE).

## How do you stop VRE spreading?

The main ways to prevent VRE from spreading are:

- Caring for patients with VRE in a single room who may have increased risk factors e.g. diarrhoea or chronic wounds.
- Staff using gloves and aprons when providing close personal care.
- Thorough cleaning and disinfection of the ward environment, toilet, commode and other equipment.
- Regular changing and washing of linen, clothing and towels.
- Regular hand washing using soap and water for 15-30 seconds.

## What illnesses can VRE cause?

The majority of people who have VRE do not become unwell; they simply 'carry' the bacteria harmlessly within their bowel. However, VRE can cause infections such as wound and urinary tract infections, sepsis or abdominal infections.

## Are some people more at risk than others?

Infections caused by VRE mainly occur in people who are already unwell with other health problems, so their immune systems may be more susceptible to infection. They may have had prolonged treatment with antibiotics or been nursed in specialist units such as intensive care or renal units. However, VRE are sometimes found in the faeces (poo) of people who have never been in hospital or had recent antibiotics.

## How do I find out if I have VRE?

It is usually found when a sample – such as blood, urine or a wound swab - is sent to the laboratory for routine testing. If VRE is found in a part of the body that does not normally have enterococci, we will collect a stool sample or a rectal swab to see if you have VRE in your bowel. This stool sample or rectal swab is known as a VRE screen and identifies colonisation not infection. There are some specialist areas of the hospital where patients may be routinely screened if they are admitted there.

## Can VRE be treated?

Yes infections caused by VRE can be treated with antibiotics. If VRE is colonised in your bowel you do not need to be treated for it.

## **If I have VRE what will happen to me?**

If you have been told that you have VRE it doesn't automatically mean you are infected so there's no need to be alarmed.

There are some extra precautions that we will take to protect you and other people while you are in hospital.

- You may be moved to a single room if this is clinically indicated.
- You may need to be treated with antibiotics if you develop a VRE infection.
- The area around your bed will be cleaned every day.
- It is always important that you thoroughly wash your hands after using the toilet and before eating.
- Try to avoid putting your fingers in your mouth.
- Staff will use PPE when it is required.

## **What about my family?**

We all have our own germs that live on our bodies. VRE does not harm healthy people, including pregnant women, children and babies. You can continue to have normal social contact.

## **Can I have visitors?**

We ask that visitors who are unwell themselves must not visit until they are better. Visitors do not need to wear gloves and aprons but they must wash their hands or use the hand sanitiser gel before and after visiting anyone in hospital. This protects patients and prevents the spread of infections to others. If your visitors are going to see another patient on the same day, they should come to see you afterwards.

Please adhere to local infection prevention and control guidance. The Trust reserves the right to refuse or end a visit if safety cannot be maintained.

### **Can VRE come back?**

Yes, so if you need to come back into hospital you will be screened again and may be cared for in a single room.

### **Will I have to stay in hospital longer?**

If you have an infection caused by VRE you might need to stay in hospital for treatment until the infection improves.

### **Who can I speak to if I have further questions?**

Please speak to any of the staff who are caring for you. If the staff are unable to answer your questions, or you require further information, please ask a member of staff to contact the Infection Prevention and Control Nurse Team on your behalf.

## If you require a special edition of this leaflet

This leaflet is available in large print, Braille, on compact disk and in other languages on request. Please contact the Patient Experience Team (PALS) on:

Telephone: 01244 366066  
or email: coch.patientexperience@nhs.net

إذا ترغب في الحصول على النسخة باللغة العربية ، فضلاً اتصل بمركز معلومات المرضى أو تحدث مع أحد الموظفين

若是你想索取這份傳單的中文譯本，請聯絡「病人預約中心」或向其中一名職員查詢。

Si vous voulez cette brochure en français, contactez le bureau des rendez-vous ou demandez à un membre du personnel.

यदि आप यह परचा हिन्दी में लेना चाहते हैं तो कृपया पेशेन्ट अॅपाइन्टमेन्ट सेन्टर से संपर्क करें या किसी स्टाफ से पूछें।

Haddii aad jeclaan laheyd buug-yarah-an oo af-Soomaali ku qoran la soo xirii xarruunta bukaan ballaminta ama wax weydii xubin shaqaalaha ka tirsan.

Si desea recibir este folleto en español, sírvase contactar al Centro de Citas para Pacientes o solicitarlo al personal.

اگر آپ کو یہ کتابچہ اردو میں درکار ہے تو پيشنٹ اپوائنٹمنٹ سينٹر يا عملے کے کسی رکن سے رابطہ قائم کریں۔

Mae'r daflen hon ar gael (ar gais), mewn print bras, ar dâp sain neu ar ddisg, ac efallai mewn ieithoedd eraill ar gais. Cysylltwch â chanolfan apwyntiadau cleifion i ofyn am gopi.

Countess of Chester Hospital NHS Foundation Trust  
Liverpool Road  
Chester  
CH2 1UL  
www.coch.nhs.uk

wzz5361nApr22pi  
40220147

Produced by Medical Photography and Illustration, COCH