

# Vancomycin-Resistant Enterococci (VRE)

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## Information for patients

Routine tests were carried out whilst you were in hospital and we have found that you are either a carrier of Vancomycin-Resistant Enterococci (VRE) called colonisation, or that you have an infection with VRE.

This leaflet explains what the infection is and how it is treated. If after reading this leaflet you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to a member of ward staff or ask to speak to a member of the Infection Prevention and Control Team.

### What is VRE?

Enterococci are bacteria that are found in the bowels of most humans.

Vancomycin-Resistant Enterococci (VRE) are enterococci that are resistant to glycopeptide antibiotics (Vancomycin and Teicoplanin).

VRE are sometimes also called GRE (Glycopeptide-Resistant Enterococci).

### How is VRE spread?

- VRE can be passed from person to person via hands or objects that are contaminated with the enterococci bacteria. The person with the contaminated hands then touches their mouth, wounds, or other entry sites in to their body and becomes infected.
- The second way VRE can be spread involves the spread of GRE bacteria (that lives harmlessly in a person's gut) to other areas of the body where they are not normally found.



## How is the infection diagnosed?

The infection is usually first found when a patient is admitted to hospital, when a urine sample or a blood sample is taken, or a rectal or wound swab is done and sent to the laboratory for testing.

## Do these bacteria always cause infection?

No. People often carry the bacteria without any symptoms or harm (called colonisation), but it can sometimes lead to infection.

## What infections can VRE cause?

VRE commonly causes wound infections, bacteraemia (infection in the blood stream), and infections of the abdomen and pelvis. VRE may also cause infections in the bile duct, heart valves, or the urinary tract.

The resistant bacteria do not cause more dangerous infections than the sensitive strains, but the infections may be more difficult to treat.

## Can it be treated?

People who are simply colonised with the bacteria do not need treatment. In most people these bacteria will disappear on their own over time. However, despite being resistant to many of the commonly-used antibiotics, be reassured that treatment options are still available if you do get an infection.

## Will I have to stay in hospital while I am being treated?

You may not have to stay in hospital until the infection is gone. You may be able to go home if you feel well enough, whether you are still carrying the bacteria or not.

## How can the spread of these bacteria be prevented in hospital?

People in hospital are more at risk of infection because their body defences are weakened by illness, surgery, medication, and the use of invasive devices such as urinary catheters and intravenous (IV) lines.

- It is preferable for patients with VRE to **move to a single room**. Hospital staff involved in the direct personal care of these patients will wear gloves and aprons, if there is a risk that they will come into contact with the patient's blood or other body fluids such as urine.
- **The patient's room will be cleaned daily**. Any equipment that is used on other patients as well as the infected patient will be cleaned after each use.
- Stopping the spread of bacteria relies mainly on everyone (patients, hospital staff, and visitors) having **good hand hygiene** practices. Particularly after using the toilet or caring for wounds or devices such as urinary catheters.

**Visitors or relatives must clean their hands before and after visiting**, as with any patient visited in hospital.

- **Visitors must not sit on the beds and should not visit if they are unwell themselves.**

## What happens when I go home?

Having these bacteria should not affect you or your family at home. Usual personal hygiene (washing your hands) and household cleaning is enough. There are no restrictions on what activities you can take part in and on people visiting your home.

If you have a wound and it becomes red, swollen, or oozes, or you develop a fever, please contact your GP and tell them that you had VRE.

## What if I have further questions?

If you have any questions or concerns, please speak to either the nurse in charge of the ward or the matron. If they are unable to help you or you need further information, please contact a member of the Infection Prevention and Control Team on:

- Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother Hospital, Margate  
Telephone: 01843 22 55 44 extension 725-3625
- Kent and Canterbury Hospital, Canterbury  
Telephone: 01227 86 40 49
- William Harvey Hospital, Ashford  
Telephone: 01233 63 33 31 extension 723-8202 or 723-8198

**This leaflet has been produced with and for patients**

If you would like this information in **another language, audio, Braille, Easy Read, or large print** please ask a member of staff. You can ask someone to contact us on your behalf.

**Any complaints, comments, concerns, or compliments** please speak to your doctor or nurse, or contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on 01227 78 31 45, or email [ekh-tr.pals@nhs.net](mailto:ekh-tr.pals@nhs.net)

**Patients should not bring in large sums of money or valuables into hospital.** Please note that East Kent Hospitals accepts no responsibility for the loss or damage to personal property, unless the property had been handed in to Trust staff for safe-keeping.

**Further patient leaflets** are available via the East Kent Hospitals web site [www.ekhuft.nhs.uk/patientinformation](http://www.ekhuft.nhs.uk/patientinformation)