

Vancomycin-resistant enterococci (VRE)



Information for patients and visitors

This leaflet explains what vancomycin-resistant enterococci (VRE) is, how it affects us, how it spreads and what we can do to stop it spreading. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to speak to the doctors or nurses caring for you.

Confirming your identity

Before you have a treatment or procedure, our staff will ask you your **name** and **date of birth** and check your **ID band**. If you don't have an ID band we will also ask you to confirm your address.

If we don't ask these questions, then please ask us to check.

Ensuring your safety is our primary concern.

What is VRE?

VRE stands for vancomycin-resistant enterococci.

Enterococci are bacteria (germs) that live in the gastrointestinal tract (bowels) of most people without causing illness. This is called colonisation.

Vancomycin is an antibiotic used to treat infections caused by enterococci. When enterococci become resistant to vancomycin (the antibiotic no longer works against the bacteria), they are called vancomycin-resistant enterococci or VRE.

This **does not** mean that someone who has an infection caused by VRE cannot be treated, just that they will have to be given different antibiotics to the ones usually used.

What is the difference between VRE infection and VRE colonisation?

Most of the time VRE do not cause any problems and people who are colonised with the bacteria do not look or feel different from anyone else.

However, sometimes VRE can get into other parts of your body and make you feel ill. If this happens, we can use another antibiotic to treat it. Both colonised and infected people can spread the bacteria.

VRE can also become resistant to another antibiotic, called linezolid. If this happens, you will be asked to wear long gowns. So will the nurses and doctors caring for you. Your doctor will explain what other antibiotic you will be given.



Who is most at risk of getting VRE infection?

People who are at increased risk of acquiring an infection caused by VRE include those who:

- have been in hospital for a long period of time
- have weakened immune systems, are transplant patients, or are in intensive care
- are patients on dialysis
- have previously been treated with antibiotics such as vancomycin
- have medical devices inserted such as catheters or drips
- have undergone surgery involving the abdomen or chest area

How is VRE spread?

It can be spread:

- from person to person by touching the hands of someone who is infected or colonised
- by touching room surfaces or medical equipment that have VRE on them

It is not spread through the air or by coughing or sneezing.

What are the symptoms of a VRE infection?

You get the same symptoms as you would with any other bacterial infection. These include:

- fever
- feeling generally unwell
- fast pulse
- redness, swelling, pain or heat at a specific site

VRE can sometimes get into your bloodstream from an existing infection, such as an abscess or a urinary tract infection, or from a medical device, such as a urinary catheter or a drip into a vein. If you are infected this way, the symptoms can be the same as for other bacteria, such as a fever, shivering and low blood pressure.

How do I know if I have a VRE colonisation?

It is impossible to tell if someone has VRE by looking at them because it is in their bowel or other parts of their body and there are no signs or symptoms.

If we think you might have a VRE infection, we may take the following samples and send them to a laboratory for testing: blood, wound swab, urine or sputum (spit).

How is a VRE infection treated?

If you are colonised with VRE you do not need any treatment.

If the VRE is causing infection, we will consider giving you antibiotics.

What happens if I have VRE?

If we find VRE in a sample taken from you while you are in hospital, we will take some extra precautions when caring for you:

- you will be put into isolation and moved to a single room
- all clinical staff and visitors must wash their hands using soap and water or use alcohol hand rub before going into or leaving your room
- we will put a sign on your door to remind everyone of the precautions they need to take

Do visitors need to take any special precautions?

Your family and friends are welcome to visit you. To prevent the spread of VRE to other patients or elsewhere in the hospital, visitors must:

- always wash their hands using soap and water or alcohol hand rub before going into and leaving your room
- not eat in your bed space
- not use patient bathrooms



Things to remember when in isolation

- do not visit the ward day room
- do not go to other patients' bed areas
- wash your hands before meals, and after using the toilet

What should I do when I go home?

Good hand and personal hygiene, regularly changing bedsheets and not sharing towels will help prevent your family and friends from getting VRE.

Do I need to tell anyone I have VRE?

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

Will I always have VRE?

Once your wounds have healed or your urinary catheter has been taken out, VRE will disappear from these areas. You may still have VRE in your bowel, along with other 'good' bacteria, but they are unlikely to cause any problems.

Who can I contact with queries and concerns?

If you or your carers have any questions about your treatment or any information in this leaflet, please do not hesitate to ask one of the members of the nursing or medical staff on your ward.

You can also contact the Infection Prevention and Control teams at our hospital sites:

King's College Hospital, Denmark Hill

Tel: **020 3299 4374**

Email: **kch-tr.KCH-IC-Nurses@nhs.net**



Princess Royal University Hospital, Orpington Hospital,
Beckenham Beacon and Queen Mary's Hospital, Sidcup

Tel: **01689 863463**

Email: **kch-tr.PRUHInfectionPreventionandControlNurses@nhs.net**

PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) is a service that offers support, information and assistance to patients, relatives and visitors. They can also provide help and advice if you have a concern or complaint that staff have not been able to resolve for you. They can also pass on praise or thanks to our teams.

PALS at King's College Hospital, Denmark Hill, London SE5 9RS

Tel: **020 3299 3601**

Email: **kch-tr.palsdh@nhs.net**

PALS at Princess Royal University Hospital,

Farnborough Common, Orpington, Kent BR6 8ND

Tel: **01689 863252**

Email: **kch-tr.palspruh@nhs.net**

If you would like the information in this leaflet in a different language or format, please contact our Communications and Interpreting telephone line on 020 3299 4826 or email kch-tr.accessibility@nhs.net.