

# VRE

(Vancomycin Resistant Enterococci)

A patient's guide



### **What are VRE?**

VRE stands for Vancomycin Resistant Enterococci. Sometimes the term GRE is used which stands for Glycopeptide Resistant Enterococci. In this leaflet the term VRE will be used.

### **What are enterococci?**

Enterococci are bacteria (bugs) that are commonly found in the bowels (gut) of most humans. There are many different types of enterococci which colonise (live harmlessly) in the gut, but a few have the potential to cause infections.

VRE are types of enterococci that are resistant to certain antibiotics (glycopeptide antibiotics), namely Vancomycin and Teicoplanin.

### **What types of infection do VRE cause?**

Most people who have VRE will not get an infection with it. If infection occurs, the most common types of infection are found in:

- Wounds
- The abdomen and pelvis
- The bloodstream

Occasionally infections can occasionally occur in the urinary tract, the bile duct and in heart valves.

### **Are some people more at risk of developing an infection than others?**

Infections caused by VRE are more likely to occur in hospital patients, especially those:

- Whose immune system is impaired.
- Who have been treated previously with certain antibiotics (e.g. Vancomycin)
- Who have had a prolonged hospital stay.
- Who are or have been in specialist units (e.g. intensive care).

People may have VRE already when they are admitted to hospital although in these cases the source of VRE is usually unknown.

### **How is VRE diagnosed?**

VRE is found by testing stool samples or swabs taken from body sites (e.g. wounds or the rectum) in a microbiology laboratory.

### **How is an infection caused by VRE treated?**

Treatment is always decided on an individual basis. Sometimes VRE can live harmlessly and will not need to be treated.

Sometimes the treatment may involve removal of an indwelling device for instance, if you have a urinary catheter and develop a urine infection caused by VRE, you may need to have the catheter removed. Sometimes intravenous antibiotics will need to be given if the infection is more serious for example if it is in the bloodstream.

### **How is VRE spread?**

There are two ways by which spread can occur:

- VRE spread from the patient's own gut, where they live harmlessly, to an area of the body where they do not normally live.
- VRE is passed from one patient to another either

through direct contact with each other or by indirect contact, for example, from touching surfaces or items that the person with VRE may have touched, such as equipment.

### **How can the spread be prevented?**

There are several ways in which the spread of VRE can be prevented:

- All staff, patients and visitors should pay particular attention to their hand hygiene.
- Depending on the location and severity of the VRE infection, you may need to be nursed in a single room with access to your own toilet facilities.
- If you, as the patient, have diarrhoea you should, when possible, be cared for in a single room with your own toilet or commode. VRE does not cause diarrhoea but it may be spread more easily if you are suffering from diarrhoea.
- If you are isolated in a side room with a potential infection, protective equipment, for example,

gloves and aprons should be worn by staff and, in certain circumstances, by visitors. Restricting the use of antibiotics to those patients who really need them will also help to limit the prevalence of VRE.

### **What about visitors?**

- It is quite safe for friends and family to visit but they must clean their hands before and after visiting. Visitors are encouraged to use the alcohol-based hand gel that is available, but if you have diarrhoea, then soap and water must be used instead.
- Visitors do not need to wear gloves and aprons unless you have diarrhoea, or they are giving you close personal care and then they would need to wear these protective items.
- We ask visitors not to sit on patients' beds, but to use the chairs available.
- Visitors should also use the public toilet facilities and not the bathrooms that patients use.
- If visitors are seeing more than one patient, they should visit you last.

### **Will having VRE delay discharge?**

Having VRE will not delay any planned discharge home. You can go home before the VRE has cleared. This does not usually pose a risk to family and friends. There is no need to restrict visitors or your activities.

Good hygiene practice should continue at home, including hand washing after going to the toilet, before and after handling food and before eating. Household cleaning can be carried out as normal and laundry can be washed in the usual way.

### **Is it possible to get rid of VRE from the bowel?**

VRE may be cleared from the bowel as you recover, but this is not always the case. It may stay in the bowel for some time without causing further problems. Antibiotics should be taken as prescribed by your doctor and only when necessary in order to prevent the growth of resistant bacteria such as VRE.

### **Further information**

Please do not hesitate to ask a member of the ward staff, in the first instance, if you have any further questions or ask to contact a member of the Infection Prevention and Control team as listed below.

#### **Clinical Nurse Specialist**

Ext. 4685/bleep 131

#### **Infection Control Nurse**

Ext. 6032/bleep 186



**Papworth Hospital NHS Foundation Trust**  
Papworth Everard, Cambridge, CB23 3RE

Tel: 01480 830541

Fax: 01480 831315

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

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Tel: 01480 364657

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