

What are *Enterococci*

Enterococci are bacteria, which are normally found in a person's gastrointestinal tract (gut or bowel) and the female genitourinary tract without causing a problem or infection. This state whereby individuals carry the bacteria is often referred to as 'normal flora' or being a 'carrier' or 'colonised' with the bacteria. The bacteria may cause an infection if it gets into particularly, blood, wounds or urine. The bacteria do not normally cause infections in healthy people, but may in those whose immune system may be severely weakened for example: those who are very sick in hospital or when normal defences are compromised by either disease or surgery, people undergoing organ transplant, renal dialysis, cancer treatment. The antibiotic 'vancomycin' is increasingly used to treat serious enterococci infection.

How are Enterococci spread?

Enterococci can be found on surfaces (such as: telephones, doorknobs), which have been touched by unwashed hands particularly following bathroom use. In hospitals it can be picked up from surfaces or objects contaminated with enterococci when these surfaces are touched. It may also be spread directly from person to person particularly from health care workers hands if they are not cleansed between contact with patients. Other possible ways enterococci may spread is by sharing other patient's toiletry items for example: towels, soaps or washcloths (sharing of newspapers and books is not a problem).

What is VRE (*Vancomycin Resistant Enterococcus*) ?

VRE stands for Vancomycin Resistant Enterococcus and refers to the strains of enterococci that have become resistant to the antibiotic vancomycin. Resistance to vancomycin was first reported in 1986, and since then it has been on the increase worldwide.

Who is at risk of VRE?

People who have been previously treated with the antibiotic vancomycin are at highest risk of developing VRE. This may occur if the enterococci, which are part of the persons 'normal flora' develops its own resistance mechanism to the antibiotic vancomycin.

A person may carry VRE or be colonised with VRE without causing a problem or infection.

Can VRE be spread from person to person?

Yes. VRE can be spread in the exact same way enterococci.

Who is at risk of getting an VRE infection?

As with enterococci, VRE does not normally cause infection in healthy people but in those whose immune system may be severely weakened.

Is VRE infection of more concern than other infections?

Any type of infection is of concern. The risk of getting a VRE infection is no greater than other organisms. The problem with VRE is that it may be resistant to many antibiotics limiting the choice of antibiotics available to treat the

infection. It may make some VRE infection more difficult to treat.

How do I know if I have VRE?

You may be informed in hospital if VRE is identified in during your hospital stay.

If VRE is found what happens?

A sample of your faeces and other swabs for example a wound swab, may be taken to identify the extent of the VRE carriage.

You may be moved to a single room if you have diarrhoea or as advised by the Infection Control Nurse /Doctor at the hospital, particularly if you are on a ward with other patients at high risk of getting a VRE infection. This move is undertaken to reduce the risk of spread to other patients.

Instructions on how to enter and exit the room will be placed on the room door. All persons entering/exiting the room, including your visitors are requested to strictly adhere to the instructions as follows:

- Perform hand hygiene using an alcohol hand rub before/on entering and exiting the room
- A disposable plastic apron will be worn by hospital staff and visitors entering your room. This apron is removed at the exit door just before exiting the room.

Please inform the ward nurse manager if any hospital staff does not comply with these instructions.

Is there any thing else that would help in reducing the risk of spread of VRE?

Yes. The use of good basic hygiene measures is extremely important and their application not only by hospital staff but also patients and visitors. These measures include:

- Hand washing after using the toilet and before eating/drinking. When washing hands/applying hand rub be careful to include fingertips and thumbs in the process.
- Remind staff to perform hand hygiene before touching for example your drips, drains, dressings if you think they did not do so. Do not share other patient's personal belongings such as razors, washcloths soap, combs etc.
- If you use a urine specimen container (example for measuring your urinary output) please let your nurse or nurse assistant knows so that it can be removed.
- Always let the nurse, nurse assistant or housekeeping staff know if you find a toilet soiled. Do not try and clean it yourself.
- Always let staff know if the supply of toilet paper, hand soap or paper towel dispensers are empty or just finished.
- Visitors should apply hand rub to their hands on entering/leaving the wards and before visiting other patients in the ward or hospital
- Do not sit on other patient's beds. Please use a chair.
- Visitors should not use patient's toilets.

If I am in a single room with special instructions on the door can I go for a walk?

If you have diarrhoea you will be requested to stay in the room till the diarrhoea has subsided.

Will I ever lose the VRE bacteria?

Some people may continue to carry VRE indefinitely; others may lose VRE after antibiotic treatment is stopped.

What happens when I go home?

You continue with your normal family life. If you carry VRE remember to always wash your hands following toilet use.

Are my family or friends at risk of VRE ?

Not if they are in general good health. If you have a sick relative at home it is important for you to wash your hands if you are directly involved in their care.. However, this is recommend for all carers irrespective or whether they have VRE or not.

If you would like more information or have any questions on VRE a member of the Infection Control Team would be happy to speak to you. The ward staff will contact a member of the team contact the team on your behalf.

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VRE
(Vancomycin –Resistant *Enterococcus*)

**PATIENT/VISITOR
INFORMATION LEAFLET**