

What is Vancomycin resistant enterococci (VRE)?

Enterococci (enter-oh-cock-i) are bacteria that normally live in the gastrointestinal tract (gut), without causing illness. Enterococci are harmless if contained within the gut however they can cause serious infections if they enter other parts of the body.

Vancomycin is an antibiotic used to treat infections caused by enterococci. When enterococci become resistant to vancomycin (meaning the antibiotics are no longer effective), they are called Vancomycin resistant enterococci or VRE.

People at risk of VRE are those who have:

- had long term treatment with vancomycin or other antibiotics
- a weakened immune systems e.g. cancer or a transplant
- had major surgery or have a chronic disease urine catheters or intravenous lines into their veins.

How do you stop the spread of VRE?

VRE can be passed from person to person, usually via hands, or contact with contaminated surfaces or equipment.

To prevent spreading VRE:

- clean your hands (with soap and water or with alcohol based hand rub)
 - after touching affected areas e.g. wounds
 - after touching your face or blowing your nose
 - after going to the toilet or grooming yourself
- keep affected areas (e.g. wounds) covered.

What if I get an infection with VRE?

VRE infections can be treated with other specialised antibiotics, often more than two types, and for longer periods. No one is sure how long VRE remains in or on the body. We know that some people can carry it in their bowel harmlessly for weeks and months.

How will VRE affect my care?

You may be placed in a single room and staff may need to use gloves and gowns to care for you. Staff are required to perform hand hygiene before and after contact with you or after being in your room.

Your doctor will determine if you need to have wound swabs or blood tests and if antibiotic treatment is required.



What about visitors?

Visitors are asked:

- to clean their hands before and after they visit you
- not to use your bathroom
- not to sit on your bed or place personal items on your bed
- not to visit if sick (with flu or gastro type illness) or if they have wounds

If visitors or family help you with care, such as assisting you with dressing or showering, then they may be asked to wear gloves and a gown.

What happens when you are discharged?

To prevent the spread of VRE to other people when you are at home, it is important that you follow these precautions:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water and dry thoroughly especially after going to the toilet or before preparing food.
- Keep wounds, cuts and abrasions clean and covered until healed.
- Keep surfaces such as benches, bathrooms and toilets clean.
- Use your own towels and face cloths. Do not share these items with other people.
- Avoid sharing grooming items e.g. nail scissors, tweezers, razors and toothbrushes.
- If you are in a sporting team it is advisable not to share towels or drink bottles with team mates.

Make sure you follow instructions and advice provided by your doctor or healthcare provider on how to care for wounds or manage medical devices.

No special requirements are needed for your clothing and towels, eating utensils and dishes. They can be washed in the normal way using detergent or laundry powder. Extra disinfectant is not needed.

You do not have to tell anyone (other than health professionals) of your VRE status.

What if I am readmitted to hospital?

It is important to tell your doctor or health professional that you have, or have had, VRE every time you are admitted to hospital.

You can speak with your doctor or health professional or access more information by searching the term "VRE" at www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au.

Disclaimer This document describes the generally accepted practice at the time of publication only. It is only a summary of clinical knowledge regarding this area. The Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital makes no warranty, express or implied, that the information contained in this document is comprehensive. They accept no responsibility for any consequence arising from inappropriate application of this information.
VRE Vancomycin Resistant Enterococci #94 | Owner: Infection Control
Last published: 09/10/17 | Next review: 09/10/19

