

If you require a special edition of this leaflet

This leaflet is available in large print. Arrangements can also be made on request for it to be explained in your preferred language. Please contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) email: rjah.pals.office@nhs.net

Feedback

Tell us what you think of our patient information leaflet. Please send your comments to the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) email: rjah.pals.office@nhs.net

Date of publication: June 2024
Date of review: June 2027
Created by: Infection Prevention and Control Team
© RJAHS Trust 2024

The Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt
Orthopaedic Hospital NHS Foundation Trust,
Oswestry, Shropshire SY10 7AG
Tel: 01691 404000
www.rjah.nhs.uk

design by Medical Illustration

Information for patients A Guide to VRE



Infection Prevention and Control



Scan the QR code to
access the **digital version**
of this leaflet

What is VRE?

VRE stands for Vancomycin Resistant Enterococci. Enterococci are a group of bacteria that are usually live harmlessly in your gut (this is called colonisation). Sometimes these bacteria can develop resistance to common antibiotics. Vancomycin is a very powerful antibiotic, and this means infections with VRE are more difficult to treat. If these resistant bacteria move to a normally sterile part of the body, such as the bloodstream, they can cause infection.

How does VRE spread?

VRE is spread by direct person to person contact and by contact with surfaces that are contaminated with VRE bacteria. It is spread more easily in patients with diarrhoea. It is not spread by coughing or sneezing. In a hospital, where there are many vulnerable patients, the spread of resistant bacteria can cause problems. You will be assessed by healthcare staff as to whether you need to be nursed in a single room or in a bay with others. Healthcare workers must wear aprons and gloves when caring for you. Staff must wash their hands with soap and water following glove removal. The most important measure for you to take is to wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water, especially after going to the toilet. Inform staff immediately if you develop diarrhoea.

You should avoid touching medical devices (if you have any) such as your urinary catheter tube and your intravenous drip, particularly at the point where it is inserted into your body or skin.

Visitors must wash their hands on entering and leaving the room and will be asked to wear an apron and gloves if they are helping you with personal care.

Notes:

Infection prevention and control is everyone's responsibility. Healthcare workers, patients and visitors all have a vital role to play in preventing the spread of healthcare associated infections.

How did I get VRE?

It can be difficult to say when or where you picked it up. However, there is an increased chance of picking up these bacteria if you:

- have had a prolonged hospital stay
- have been nursed in an intensive care unit
- have a weakened immune system
- have had a previous prolonged course of antibiotic treatment
- have been in contact with a person carrying VRE

Can VRE be treated?

If the VRE is causing infection, we will consider giving you antibiotics. However, if you are colonised with VRE, but have not developed an infection, you will not need to be treated. For those who are colonised with VRE, specific infection control precautions will need to be taken whilst you are in hospital to reduce the chance of the VRE spreading to anyone else.

Will I have to stay in hospital longer because of the VRE?

Usually there will be no delay if you are returning to your own home. If you are having rehabilitation, it may be necessary for you to attend only specific group activities.

Can I have visitors whilst in hospital?

Yes, you can have visitors as VRE does not usually pose a threat to healthy people, hospital staff or to family members or close contacts of an infected patient. The nursing staff will advise of any necessary precautions that may be required.

When should I wash my hands?

You should make regular and thorough hand washing as part of your daily routine, especially:

- Before eating or handling food
- After using the toilet /commode
- After touching your wound, catheter
- After blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing
- After touching animals or animal waste
- After handling soiled clothing/rubbish
- After changing a nappy
- Before and after touching a sick or injured person
- Before, during and after a visit to a hospital ward or residential or nursing home
- After removing any sort of glove

Do not forget to encourage children to wash their hands at these times too. **It is ok to remind healthcare staff to wash their hands.** It may feel like an awkward question to ask when someone is looking after you, but you are entitled to ask if you are concerned.

What happens after I go home?

Having VRE colonisation should not affect your normal daily activities, social life, or prevent you going to work. If you have an open wound, it should be kept covered with a clean dressing. It is important to wash your hands well before and after touching your wound.

How to manage or wash your soiled clothing?

We do not wash patients' personal clothing in hospital. If your own clothing becomes soiled, your clothes will be sealed in a special pink dissolvable bag. This pink bag will then be placed into a white plastic 'patient's property' bag and stored in your locker, ready to be washed at home.

How to wash soiled clothing using a washing machine:

1. Take the pink bag out of the white 'patient's property' bag.
2. Place the pink bag into the washing machine. Do not open the pink bag as it has been specially designed to go straight into the washing machine. Do not add any other items of clothing into the washing machine.
3. You should always wash your hands thoroughly after handling soiled clothing, or the bag of soiled clothing.
4. Use a biological powder, liquid, or tablets if possible.
5. Use a pre-wash cycle before the main wash cycle.
6. Wash the items at the very least 60°C so that the pink bag dissolves and releases the clothing into the washing machine (washing at a lower temperature may not dissolve the bag, which may result in the parts of the bag sticking to the clothing).
7. When the washing cycle is complete, remove the washing from the washing machine and dry the clothing naturally or in a tumble dryer.