

# VRE – Vancomycin Resistant Enterococci

## Consumer information

### What is VRE?

Enterococci are bacteria that live in our bowel without causing any harm. If these bacteria are given the opportunity to spread to other body sites, they may cause an infection.

An infection caused by enterococci can be treated with several different antibiotics.

Vancomycin resistant enterococci (VRE) are enterococci that have become resistant to an antibiotic called vancomycin. Infections caused by VRE can be harder to treat.

### Where did I get VRE?

You may have got VRE before you came into hospital or you may have picked it up in hospital.

### Carrying VRE?

You can have VRE in your bowel without knowing or being harmed by it or having any symptoms.

Carrying the bacteria without having an infection is called being “colonised” with VRE.

If doctors need to find out if you are colonised with VRE you will need to provide a small amount of poo in a container or we may need to dab a swab outside or inside your bottom. The specimen will be tested by the laboratory to see if there is any VRE in it.

### Being infected with VRE

Sometimes VRE can cause an infection. This happens when the bacteria enters another body site including the bloodstream. VRE can cause:

- urinary tract infections
- wound infections after surgery
- bloodstream infections.

To find out if VRE is causing an infection, a doctor or nurse might take specimens from other body sites. Test results will help doctors decide how to treat the infection.

### How does VRE spread to other people?

The most important way VRE spreads is through direct skin contact and by hands.

For example, if you are colonised with VRE, the bacteria may get on surfaces around you. When someone touches those surfaces, the VRE can get on their hands.

## Will having VRE affect my hospital stay?

If you have VRE, it's important for staff to stop it spreading to other patients.

They do this by:

- caring for you in a single room
- cleaning their hands after touching you or your surroundings
- wearing gloves and gowns/aprons when they come into your room, and removing them when they leave your room.

It's very important for you to help stop VRE spreading too.

Wash your hands with soap and running water:

- before handling food or drinks
- after going to the toilet
- after handling dirty washing
- when leaving your room.

Follow instructions from your nurse or doctor.

## Can I have visitors while I am in hospital?

There are usually no restrictions on visitors but please check with the nursing staff if you or your visitors have any concerns.

Your visitors, including children, must wash their hands or use alcohol-based hand rub **every** time they leave your hospital room so they do not spread VRE to themselves or other patients. This is the most important way to prevent the spread of all germs.

Staff may also instruct your visitors to wear gloves and/or gowns/aprons while visiting you.

## What about when I go home?

Make sure you clean your hands, especially after going to the toilet. This is one of the most important ways of preventing infections spreading.

## Further questions?

Please ask your doctor or nurse if you have any more questions about VRE.



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This information has been reviewed by Tasmanian consumers.