

Patient Information Vancomycin Resistant Enterococci

Infection Prevention Team

We have written this leaflet to give you information on a type of bacteria called vancomycin-resistant enterococci and the infections that they can cause. It is not intended to replace the explanations and information given to you by our staff but we hope you will find it a useful guide. If you have any questions or need any further information, please do not hesitate to ask the nurse or doctor looking after you. You can also request a visit from the Infection Prevention Nurses.

What are vancomycin-resistant enterococci?

Enterococci are a type of bacteria always found in the human body. All of us have this type of bacteria in our intestines (gut) and in some women they are also present in the vaginal area and the urinary tract. Enterococci are also often found in the environment.

Occasionally enterococci cause infections in the urinary tract, blood-stream or wounds. These infections are often treated with an antibiotic called vancomycin. Sometimes though, enterococci become resistant to this antibiotic - in other words, vancomycin does not work against them. We call this vancomycin-resistant enterococci or VRE.

Who is at risk of infection caused by VRE?

People at an increased risk of getting an infection caused by VRE include those who:-

- Have been in hospital for a long time.
- Have weakened immune systems, transplant patients, for example, or those in intensive care.
- Have undergone surgery involving the abdominal or chest area.
- Have medical devices such as catheters or drips which have been in place for a long time.
- Have been previously treated with antibiotics such as vancomycin and cefuroxime.

What will happen if I am found to have VRE?

Generally speaking, if you are found to be *colonised* with VRE in other words, you have the bacteria in or on your body, but no symptoms of infection, you will not need any treatment. We may however give you a special body wash to reduce the number of bacteria on your skin and so reduce the risk of infection developing.

If you are found to have an *infection* caused by VRE, then we will treat you with antibiotics. Although VRE is resistant to vancomycin, there are other antibiotics which can be used. We will carry out laboratory tests to determine which drug can best treat your infection.

Nursing Care

What happens if you are found to have VRE will depend on whether it is likely that you or patients near you on the ward are at risk of getting infection with these bacteria. We may continue to care for you in same place and the same way as before. We will simply keep an even closer eye on you for any signs of infection and may clean the area around you more frequently to reduce the risk that the bacteria could spread. This will be if:-

- We think that your body is strong enough to keep the VRE bacteria in check.
- You are being cared for on a ward where other patients are generally fairly well and so unlikely to get an infection even if the VRE bacteria is passed on to them.
- The VRE bacteria are found in your faeces or urine rather than for example in a wound.

We may move you from the ward into a single room with separate toilet facilities. Extra cleaning of the room will take place, staff will wear gloves and aprons when caring for you and items of medical equipment may be reserved for your use only. All of this reduces the risk of the VRE bacteria being passed onto other patients. This will be if:-

- We think that you or patients around you are at high risk of infection from VRE, perhaps because your immune system is weakened or because you have wounds or medical devices such as a central or Hickman Intravenous line etc.

- You are being cared for in an area where the other patients are also at high risk of infection.
- The VRE bacteria are found in a part of your body where we think it is likely to cause infection: perhaps in a wound.

Will I be tested for VRE when I come into hospital?

As VRE can live in your body without causing any problems, we do not generally test for it when you come into hospital. It is sometimes detected during routine testing that may be needed while you are in hospital.

Can I be cured of VRE?

VRE may go away on its own eventually, especially if you do not take antibiotics. However as enterococci normally live in the body, you may remain a carrier indefinitely. The bacteria should not cause any problems if you are generally fit and well.

What happens when I am discharged from hospital?

If you have VRE, there is no need to take any special precautions once you are home. Just continue to wash your hands thoroughly after going to the toilet and before preparing food and clean your bathroom regularly and thoroughly.

You should mention that you were found to have VRE to any healthcare professionals caring for you in the future. It may be that they will test you again for the bacteria and if it is still present, care for you away from other patients who are at risk of infection. It will certainly ensure that you receive the right antibiotics if you develop infection in future.

What can I do to help prevent the spread of VRE and other bacteria and infections?

Hand washing with soap and water is the most effective way to prevent the spread of infections in hospital. You can help us fight infection by making sure that you and your visitors clean your hands regularly, especially after using the toilet and before eating. You can also cleanse your hand with the alcohol hand rubs available on the ward. These should be used as well as hand washing though, as they are not always effective by themselves.

You will notice that our staff also regularly clean their hands, that they will sometimes wear disposable aprons and gloves, and that all surfaces are regularly cleaned. Again, all of this helps to prevent the spread of infection.

Where can I get more information?

Any further concerns can be discussed with hospital staff (nurses, medical staff) or a member of the Infection Prevention Team.

INFECTION PREVENTION TEAM

Nevill Hall Hospital.....	01873 732048
Royal Gwent Hospital.....	01633 238101 / 234921
Community, Caerphilly Miners	07903 324603