



Vancomycin Resistant Enterococci (VRE): Frequently asked questions

What are enterococci?

Many people carry bacteria called enterococci in their bowel without causing any illness. Rarely, enterococci can find their way into other parts of the body and cause an infection, most often in people whose ability to fight off infections have been lowered (e.g. cancer patients, kidney dialysis patients). The most common sites of infection are the urinary tract and wounds.

What is VRE?

VRE stands for *Vancomycin Resistant Enterococci*.

Vancomycin is an antibiotic which is sometimes used to treat infections caused by enterococci. VRE are enterococci strains that are resistant to vancomycin, although there are several other antibiotics which can be used for treatment.

People who carry VRE are described as being "colonised". They usually have no signs or symptoms and experience no ill effects. The VRE live harmlessly in the bowel or on the skin. There is no effective means of eliminating VRE from the bowel. However over a period time ranging from weeks to months, it is thought that most people will naturally get rid of VRE.

VRE colonisation is not a problem for the most patients. However in hospitals, VRE can cause infections in very sick patients, although most will recover after treatment. It is therefore important to prevent VRE from spreading within our hospitals to protect these patients.

How are VRE spread?

VRE are usually spread from person-to-person by physical contact, either directly or on the hands of another person or hospital equipment. It is not spread through coughing or sneezing.

How can we prevent VRE from being spread?

Hand washing: the best way of preventing the spread of VRE is by thorough hand washing with soap and water for a minimum of 15 seconds after toileting and before eating/food preparation.

How can the spread of VRE in hospitals be prevented?

All hospitals have infection control policies in place to address this. Prevention of spread depends on encouraging good hand hygiene practices amongst staff, visitors and patients. The best way to prevent the spread of VRE is by washing hands after visiting the toilet and before eating.

A person who has been found to be carrying or infected with VRE while in hospital in any Perth public hospital will be recorded on a hospital computer system. This alerts the staff in these hospitals to take additional measures if the person comes into hospital again. People with VRE may be in a room by themselves and hospital staff may wear gloves and aprons as well as practising good hand hygiene.

Will medical treatment be different for patient with VRE?

No, the extra measures taken will not interfere with treatment or care received while in hospital.

What about family and visitors of people with VRE?

VRE does not harm healthy people including pregnant women, children and babies. Visitors will be asked to wash their hands after visiting. At home, continue with normal hygiene practices such as washing of hands before eating and after using the toilet.

What happens if a person with VRE requires admission to hospital?

On admission to a public hospital in Perth, the computerised record will let staff know if someone has VRE. However if admitted to any hospital outside Perth or a private hospital, hospital staff should be told about this on arrival so that precautions can be put in place if necessary.

Where can I get further information or advice?

Patients and their families should first seek advice from their Doctor and/or Infection Control Nurse at the hospital, or from their General Practitioner.