

# Vancomycin Resistant Enterococci (VRE)

## Fact Sheet

### What is VRE?

*Enterococci* are bacteria that are normally present in the human intestines as well as being found in the environment. Sometimes these bacteria can cause infections. Vancomycin is an antibiotic that is often used to treat infections caused by *Enterococci*. When *Enterococci* develop resistance to Vancomycin, they are called Vancomycin Resistant Enterococci (VRE).

### What is the difference between infection and colonization?

**Infection** means that bacteria (germs) are in or on the body and make you sick, which results in signs and symptoms such as fever, pus from a wound, diarrhoea, or pneumonia.

**Colonisation** means you carry the bacteria in or on your body, but you do not become sick. People who are colonized will not have signs or symptoms. Colonised patients are sometimes given treatment to prevent infecting developing.

Both colonised and infected people can spread the bacteria other patients.

### Who is at risk from VRE infections?

The following patients are at risk of VRE infection or colonization:

- Critically ill (e.g., ICU patients)
- Immuno-compromised (e.g., oncology & transplant patients)
- Have a central venous catheter device (e.g., renal patients)
- Have indwelling urinary catheter
- Long term hospitalization
- Recent broad-spectrum antibiotic therapy or have received the antibiotic Vancomycin

### How can VRE be spread?

Both can be spread by touching the skin of an infected or colonised patient (Direct Contact), or by touching a surface (Indirect Contact) that has the bacteria (germs) on it – for example, hospital beds, tables or shared equipment.

### How will my care change whilst in hospital?

- A sign is placed outside your door to alert hospital staff for the need to use special protective infection control precautions. This sign also alerts visitors of the need to speak with nursing staff prior to entering your room.
- The hospital staff will wear protective apparel such as gloves and an apron or gown when they enter your room. If the VRE has been found in your sputum, the staff may also need to wear a mask. These items are disposed of in a separate waste bin when staff leave your room.
- You will be allocated a private room with your own en-suite facilities. WE ask that your movement throughout the ward is limited to essential movement only, such as physiotherapy. If you are unsure about when you can leave your room, please speak to the nursing staff.

### Good Hand Hygiene Practices

Hand hygiene is the most effective way to prevent **ALL** infections, including the flu and the common cold. Encourage your family and friends to learn and maintain good hand hygiene practices every day. Please refer to the hand hygiene information in the patient information booklet or hand hygiene leaflet available from the Infection Prevention and Control team.

During your stay in hospital, you may have seen the staff using an alcohol-based hand rub, as an alternative to soap and water. Alcohol-based hand rubs or gels can be used for hand hygiene as long as your hands are not visibly soiled / dirty. You may choose to use this type of product at home.

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### Can I still have visitors?

Yes. However, to prevent the spread of VRE, all visitors will be required to comply with the wearing of a long-sleeved blue gown and gloves when coming to visit you. Your visitors will be educated by the nursing staff in how to correctly put on and take off these items. Your visitors will also be asked to wash their hands before coming to visit you and again before they go home. We ask that you also encourage your visitors to do this. They can use both soap and water at the wall sink in the ward, or the alcohol hand rub provided outside your room. Your visitors are requested to comply with these precautions to minimize the possibility of VRE being transferred into the rest of the hospital environment.

### Is VRE harmful to my family and friends?

In general, exposure to VRE does not cause infection in health people: this includes pregnant women, babies and children. **Casual contact such as hugging, and kissing is OK.** Being diagnosed with VRE does not prevent you from continuing sexual relations with your partner, unless otherwise advised by your doctor. If a friend or relative has had recent surgery, has an illness, or has a compromised immune system they may wish to contact the Infection Control staff or speak with their GP for further advice before visiting you in hospital.

### What happens when I go home?

- When you return home, it is important for you, your family, and your friends to continue good hand hygiene practices.
- There are no special precautions required for the washing of clothes, linen, crockery and cutlery or for the cleaning of the bath, toilet, and shower.
- It is important that anyone assisting you with close personal care wears gloves if they are going to be in contact with any wounds, blood, urine, or faeces. They must

wash their hands well, after removing the gloves and disposing of the gloves immediately in the rubbish bin.

**It is important that you always tell your doctor, nurse, paramedic or other health care provider that you have previously had VRE as this will help to prevent the future spread of VRE.**

### Where can I get further information?

You can talk to your doctor or the nursing staff. If you wish to speak with the Infection Control Department, ask your nurse to contact us. Our office hours are 8am to 4pm Monday to Friday. Our contact numbers are (02) 9480 9433 or (02) 9480 9732.

### References

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC); Hospital Acquired Infections – Vancomycin Resistant Enterococci (VRE) in Healthcare Settings (November 13, 2019)

Australian Commission for Safety and Quality in Health Care (ACSQHC); Hospital Acquired Infections - Vancomycin Resistant Enterococci (VRE) Consumer Factsheet (August 2013)

South Australia Government, Dept of Health; Vancomycin-Resistant Enterococci (VRE): Infection Prevention and Control Clinical Guideline (Version 6.3, 25 May 2020)

NSW Dept of Health; Infection Prevention and Control Policy PD2017\_013

National Health and Medical Research Council; Australian Guidelines for the Prevention and Control of Infection in Healthcare (2019)