Can family and friends visit as normal?

In normal healthy people, illness due to VRE is very rare.

Therefore family and friends of patients with VRE are not at risk and hand washing is the only action necessary after visiting a patient with VRE.

- If family members assist in the physical care of the patient, nursing staff will inform the persons involved of any extra precautions necessary.
- Persons visiting should be aware of their own health status so as to avoid either putting the patient at increased risk or themselves at risk.
- It is unwise to visit any patient if you are feeling unwell, for example, if you have gastroenteritis (vomiting/diarrhoea), or a flu-like illness.
- Visitors who themselves may have a lower resistance to infection, e.g. having undergone treatment for cancer, are on antibiotic treatment or are awaiting major surgery in the near future, should seek the advice of their G.P. in order to evaluate if any risk exists.
- The hospital can pose risks for young children, who may not have developed full immunity to germs outside their home.

Can a patient go home with VRE?

Having VRE is not a reason for remaining in hospital, once a patient is otherwise fit for discharge. Any necessary follow-up will be arranged with the patient's GP or public health nurse.

What will happen in the future if the patient needs to go to hospital?

If the patient attends any hospital in the future they should inform medical and nursing staff there that they have had VRE. Swabs and other specimens may be taken for analysis.

Please do not hesitate to ask the nursing and medical staff for more information on VRE.

Infection Prevention and Control Team
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Beacon Hospital

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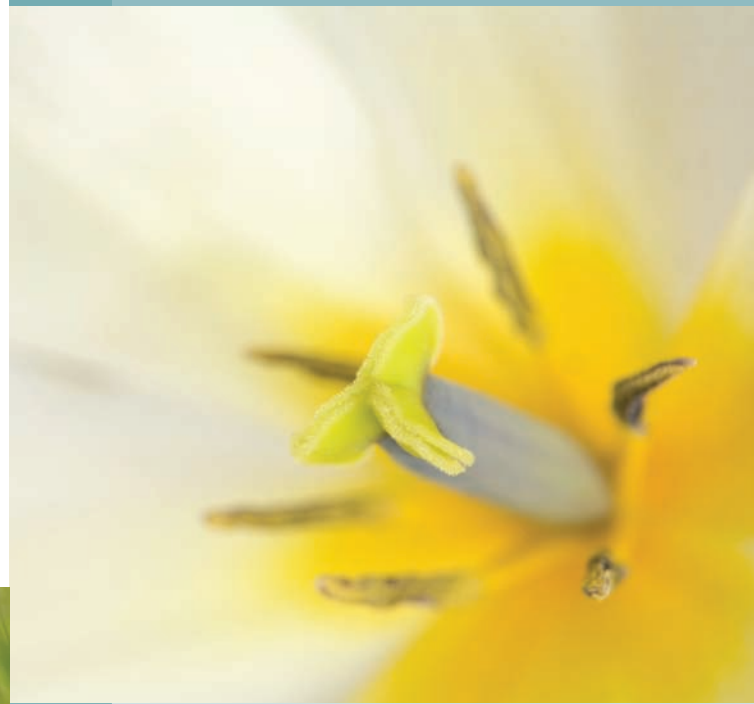
Information Leaflet on VRE



For patients and relatives

Beacon Hospital

What is VRE?

VRE is the shortened term used when referring to vancomycin-resistant enterococci. In some countries these organisms are referred to as glycopeptide resistant enterococci (GRE). The term 'vancomycin-resistant' means that the antibiotic vancomycin, often used to treat enterococci, is no longer effective.

What are enterococci?

- Enteroocci are micro-organisms, commonly found in the bowels of most animals, including humans, where they make up part of the normal bacterial flora. They can also be found in the human genital tract.
- They are hardy micro-organisms that can survive the harshest environments and can be found in the soil, water and on vegetation.
- Most people who carry enterococci don't suffer any ill effects. Carrying enterococci harmlessly like this is called 'colonisation'.
- Sometimes enterococci cause infections if they enter the body. This is more likely to happen to people who are already unwell, particularly those who are in hospital with a serious illness.
- There are many different species of enterococci, but only a few have the potential to cause infections in humans.

What type of infections do enterococci cause?

Enterococci can cause a range of different infections including:

- Wound infections
- Urinary tract infections
- Infections of the abdomen and pelvis
- Heart valve infection (endocarditis)
- Bacteraemia (infection of the blood)

How does a person acquire it?

In a number of countries, antibiotics related to Vancomycin are included in the feed given to farm animals as they help to improve meat yields. Animals and meat from farms where this practice takes place have been found to carry VRE similar to human strains. It is suspected that humans may acquire VRE through contact with these animals or by eating their meat. The micro-organism resides harmlessly in the patient's bowel until the patient is admitted to hospital. Here, due to the selective pressure of antibiotic therapy, VRE may increase in numbers and spread from the gut and cause an infection in another part of the body.

How is VRE spread?

- VRE may also be transferred from one person to another by direct contact. The main method of transfer is by the hands during patient contact.
- VRE is also spread by touching contaminated surfaces (e.g. bed-rails, door handles) that have been contaminated by someone who has not washed their hands.
- Some infections originate from VRE that may be the patient's own normal bacterial flora.

How can VRE spread be controlled?

- A patient found to be 'colonised' with VRE in a wound or in a catheter specimen of urine or those having diarrhoea need to be nursed separately from other patients to help prevent spread.
- Good hygiene measures (frequent hand washing and cleaning of the environment) should be practiced at all times to prevent the spread of VRE from person to person.

Does VRE make a person more ill?

This varies from person to person. The majority >80% (more than 80%) of patients are 'colonised' while some are infected.

- When a patient is 'colonised' with VRE, he/she has no signs or symptoms of infection. The presence of VRE does not alter their medical treatment and is not a reason to stay in hospital.

How long are patients cared for in isolation?

Patients who are isolated will be cared for in this manner until:

- VRE is no longer present;
- Until the risk of spread to other patients has diminished or
- Until discharged from hospital.

Is VRE treatable?

- Healthy people who are colonised with VRE do not need treatment.
- Patients with indwelling catheters who have developed infections due to VRE may need to have the catheter removed.
- When a patient has a serious infection e.g. bacteraemia, caused by VRE, it will be necessary to give antibiotics intravenously.