
Vancomycin Resistant Enterococci (VRE)

Infection prevention and control

Patient Information



What is Vancomycin Resistant Enterococci (VRE)?

VRE stands for Vancomycin Resistant *Enterococci* and is an example of a bacteria that is typically found in your bowels.

Enterococci are bacteria that usually live harmlessly in your gut. This is called 'colonisation'. However, these bacteria can sometimes develop resistance to common antibiotics such as Vancomycin.

I have VRE. Does this mean I have an infection?

Not necessarily an infection can occur when the bacteria enters into your bloodstream this can be due to:

- a wound or line site (such as an IV cannula or PICC line)
- by travelling up a tube into the bladder (a catheter).

Healthcare staff will assess whether you need to be nursed in a single room or in a bay with others. Staff must wear aprons and gloves when caring for you and must wash their hands after removing them. It is important that you wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water, especially after going to the toilet. Inform staff immediately if you develop diarrhoea so they can move you into a single room (if available) if you are not already in one.

You should avoid touching medical devices (if you have any) such as your urinary catheter tube and your intravenous lines, particularly at the point where it is inserted into your body or skin.

How do we look for VRE?

VRE can be picked up on many different tests – wound swabs, rectal screens, or urine samples. You will not be routinely screened for VRE specifically but the tests that you receive during your admission will pick up the bacteria if it is present.

How is VRE spread?

VRE is spread by direct person to person contact through contaminated hands and by contact with surfaces where the bacteria are present, for example on door handles and tables. It is spread more easily in patients with diarrhoea. It is not spread by coughing or sneezing.

Hand hygiene is important to reduce the spread of VRE. We advise that you:

- always wash your hands with soap and water after using the lavatory/commode and before and after eating. Ask for help if you need assistance.
- apply alcohol hand rub (hand sanitiser) or use hand wipes regularly to keep your hands clean.

What can you do to prevent getting VRE?

If you're in hospital and are worried about getting VRE, there are some steps you can take yourself.

- Do not share personal items with other patients.
- Avoid touching drips (intravenous devices), wounds or catheters.
- Your space will be cleaned regularly but feel free to ask for your bedside/bathroom area to be cleaned – do not attempt to do this yourself.
- Cleaning your hands regularly (before food, after using the bathroom, and so on).
- Feel free to ask staff if they have washed their hands before they touch you.
- Feel free to ask staff to clean the equipment they are going to use.

- Ask your visitors to wash their hands before they come onto the ward and when they leave.
- Ask them not to sit on your bed.

However, you may already carry VRE or may pick up the resistant bacteria following prolonged antibiotic use.

What is the treatment for VRE?

If you do have an infection, it can be treated with appropriate antibiotics, if required. However, if you are carrying VRE without any signs of infection (colonisation), you will not need any treatment. VRE will usually disappear from the infected areas (with or without antibiotics). However, as these bacteria normally live in the bowel, you may remain colonised with VRE without experiencing any future problems.

Will having VRE delay my discharge?

If you are otherwise well enough, your discharge date will not be delayed even if you are carrying VRE.

VRE is not a danger to healthy family, friends, or the public so there are no special precautions. You can carry on with your normal day to day activities. Hand washing and general environmental cleanliness is all that is required.

Contact details

If you would like more information, or if you have any questions/concerns about VRE, please speak to your doctor or nurse. Alternatively, you can ask to speak to a member of the **Infection Prevention and Control** team on **020 8661 3917**.

Alternatively, please call:

The Royal Marsden Hotline: 020 8915 6899

You can ring the hotline 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Call us straight away if you are feeling unwell or are worried about the side effects of cancer treatments.

This service provides specialist advice and support to all Royal Marsden patients, as well as to their carers, and both hospital and community-based doctors and nurses caring for Royal Marsden patients.

For further information, please visit the Royal Marsden website:

www.royalmarsden.nhs.uk/your-care/support-living-with-and-beyond-cancer/guidance-advice/royal-marsden-hotline

References

This booklet is evidence based wherever the appropriate evidence is available, and represents an accumulation of expert opinion and professional interpretation.

Details of the references used in writing this booklet are available on request from:

The Royal Marsden Help Centre

Telephone: Chelsea 020 7811 8438 / 020 7808 2083

Sutton 020 8661 3759 / 3951

Email: patientcentre@rmh.nhs.uk

No conflicts of interest were declared in the production of this booklet.

Should you require information in an alternative format, please contact The Royal Marsden Help Centre.

The patient information service is generously supported by The Royal Marsden Cancer Charity.

royalmarsden.org

Registered Charity No.1095197



Published September 2025. Planned review September 2028
© The Royal Marsden NHS Foundation Trust IC-1856-01



Radiotherapy and
Chemotherapy Services
F538021 & F538022

