

How is it Spread?

VRE is most commonly spread by direct hand contact with a person colonised or infected with VRE or indirectly via the hands of healthcare workers.

VRE is also spread by touching contaminated surfaces (e.g. railings, door handles) that have been contaminated by someone who has not washed their hands.

Some infections originate from VRE that may be patient's own normal bacterial flora.

VRE is NOT passed through the air or by coughing. **Hand washing is critical to prevent the spread of VRE.**

How is it Treated?

Healthy people who carry VRE in their bodies (colonisation) do not need treatment. Patients with indwelling catheters who have developed infections due to enterococci / VRE may need to have the catheter removed.

Antibiotic therapy may be needed for serious or invasive infections. Those with serious or invasive VRE infections (e.g. bacteraemia) will be treated with other antibiotics.

Please remember to wash your hands or use hand gel when visiting the Hospital

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Enterococci and Vancomycin Resistant Enterococci (VRE)

Information for Patients, Parents and Carers

Infection Prevention and Control Team

Main Hospital Number

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What are Enterococci?

Enterococci are hardy microorganisms that can survive the harshest environments and can be found in soil, water and on vegetation.

They are most commonly found in the bowels of most animals and humans, where they make up part of the normal bacterial flora. They can also be found in the human genital tract.

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 other areas in the body. This is more likely to happen to people who are already unwell, particularly those who are in hospital with a serious illness.

More than 95% of infections due to enterococci are caused by just two species, *Enterococcus faecium* and *Enterococcus faecalis*.



What Type of Infections do Enterococci Cause ?

Most people who carry enterococci don't suffer any ill effects. Enterococci can cause a range of different infections including:

- Wound infections
- Urinary tract (kidney) infections
- Infections in the abdomen
- Infections in the pelvis
- Infections in the bile duct (cholangitis)
- Heart valve infection (endocarditis)
- Bacteraemia (infection of the blood)

What is Vancomycin ?

Vancomycin is an antibiotic which can be used to treat infections caused by enterococci. Vancomycin is usually given intravenously (by a drip) to treat infections. However, Vancomycin can also be given orally (tablet).

What are Vancomycin Resistant Enterococci (VRE)?

Vancomycin-Resistant Enterococci (VRE) are enterococci that have become resistant to the antibiotic vancomycin.

Are Some People More at Risk than Others ?

Most people who carry VRE don't suffer any ill effects . Certain people are at increased risk of VRE; these include patients:

- o That are currently on or have recently taken vancomycin or other antibiotics
- o With conditions that compromise their immune system (e.g. cancer chemotherapy)
- o Who have spent a long time in hospital or other healthcare setting
- o Who have had surgery
- o Who have a long-term indwelling catheter (e.g. intravenous or urinary catheters)
- o In specialist units such as intensive care or renal units