

Vancomycin-resistant enterococci (VRE)

Other formats

If you need this information in another format such as audio tape or computer disk, Braille, large print, high contrast, British Sign Language or translated into another language, please telephone the PALS desk on 01271 314090.

What are vancomycin-resistant enterococci?

Enterococci are bacteria that are commonly found in the bowels of most humans. There are many different species of enterococci, but only a few have the potential to cause infections in humans. Some infections caused by enterococci are treated with an antibiotic called vancomycin.

There are certain strains of enterococci which have now become resistant to this antibiotic and are called vancomycin-resistant enterococci (VRE).

What illnesses do VRE cause?

VRE often cause no illness, living harmlessly in the bowel. VRE sometimes causes urinary infections and may also occasionally cause bacteraemia (blood poisoning), infections of the abdomen and pelvis, infections in the bile duct (cholangitis) or heart valves (endocarditis).

Are some people more at risk than others?

Infections caused by VRE mainly occur in hospital patients, particularly those whose immune systems are compromised, those who have had previous treatment with certain other antibiotics, those who have been in hospital a long time and those in specialist units such as intensive care or renal units. However, VRE are sometimes found in the faeces of people who have never been in hospital or have not recently been given antibiotics.

How do people contract VRE infection?

There are two routes by which patients tend to contract VRE infection. The first is by cross-infection, which occurs when bacteria from one patient are passed to another patient. The second involves the spread of VRE bacteria that reside harmlessly in a person's gut to other areas of the body where they are not normally found.

Is it treatable?

VRE do not often cause infection, but can be difficult to treat with the usual antibiotics because they are resistant to many of these.

There are alternative antibiotics that are effective against VRE, but treatment with these may mean you have to stay in hospital longer.

How can the spread be controlled?

Prompt recognition of bacteria with unusual resistances to certain antibiotics and good infection control procedures are needed to prevent spread.

VRE is most commonly spread via hands, equipment, and sometimes the environment. It is important that healthcare workers and visitors clean their hands before and after visiting a patient. If someone's hands are soiled, they should be washed with soap and water, otherwise alcohol hand gel can be used.

It is important that you wash your hands after going to the toilet and before eating.

What happens next?

Whenever possible, patients with VRE are cared for in single rooms.

It is standard practice for aprons and gloves to be used by staff when carrying out tasks which may involve contact with blood or body fluids. Their use of aprons and gloves stays the same if you carry VRE.

Will this affect my family and friends?

VRE will not cause illness to healthy people, including elderly people, pregnant women, children and babies.

All visitors should wash their hands or use alcohol gel before and after visiting any patient in the hospital, whether or not they have VRE.

If someone who has a long-term health problem wants to visit you, or if you want to visit another patient in hospital, please ask the ward nursing staff or an infection control nurse for advice.

Further information

If you have any queries or concerns, please ask the ward staff or contact the Infection Prevention and Control Department on 01271 322680.

PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) ensures that the NHS listens to patients, relatives, carers and friends, answers questions and resolves concerns as quickly as possible. If you have a query or concern call 01271 314090 or e-mail ndht.pals@nhs.net. You can also visit the PALS and Information Centre in person at North Devon District Hospital, Barnstaple.

Have your say

Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust aims to provide high quality services. However, please tell us when something could be improved. If you have a comment or compliment about a service or treatment, please raise your comments with a member of staff or the PALS team in the first instance.

'Care Opinion' comments forms are on all wards or online at www.careopinion.org.uk.

Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust
Raleigh Park, Barnstaple
Devon EX31 4JB
Tel. 01271 322577
www.northdevonhealth.nhs.uk

© Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust
This leaflet was designed by the Communications Department.
Tel: 01271 313970 / email: ndht.communications@nhs.net