

Vancomycin-resistant

This leaflet provides information about what VRE is, how it affects you, how it spreads and what we can do to stop it spreading. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to the staff member in charge of your care.

What is VRE?

Enterococci are bacteria (germs) that live in the gut of most people without causing illness. Enterococci can be resistant to vancomycin (a type of antibiotic) and other antibiotics used to treat infections. When the enterococci are resistant to vancomycin it is referred to as vancomycin-resistant enterococci or VRE for short

If you have VRE, it does not mean that your infection cannot be treated with antibiotics. It means there are fewer antibiotics that will work to treat the infection.

How did I get VRE?

It can be spread:

- from person to person by touching the hands of someone who is infected or colonised and not washing your hands afterward
- by touching room surfaces or medical equipment that have VRE on them

It is not spread through the air or by coughing or sneezing.

What is the difference between VRE infection and VRE colonisation?

Some people carry VRE bacteria in their gut which means they are colonised, as they do not have any symptoms and are not poorly. There is no need to treat people with antibiotics if they are colonised with VRE.

However, sometimes VRE can get into other parts of your body and make you feel ill. If this happens, we can use another antibiotic to treat it. Both colonised and infected people can spread the VRE bacteria.

How do I know if I have a VRE colonisation or infection?

It is impossible to tell if someone has VRE by looking at them because it is in their gut or other parts of their body and there are no signs or symptoms. At times, we may need to screen patients to see whether they are colonised with VRE. We will do this by taking a small sample from your bottom using a cotton bud, or from a poo sample.

If we think you might have a VRE infection, we may take a blood, wound swab or urine sample and send them to a laboratory for testing.

Who is most at risk of VRE infection?

People who are at increased risk of acquiring an infection caused by VRE include those who:

- have been in hospital for a long period of time
- have weakened immune systems, are transplant patients, or are in intensive care are patients on dialysis
- have been treated with vancomycin before
- have medical devices inserted such as catheters or drips
- have undergone surgery involving the abdomen or chest area

What are the symptoms of a VRE infection?

Symptoms are similar to other bacterial infections. These include:

- fever
- feeling generally unwell
- fast pulse (tachycardia)
- redness on white skin tones or discolouration on darker skin tones, swelling, pain or heat at a specific site (where a medical device is inserted)

VRE can sometimes get into your bloodstream from an existing infection, such as an abscess, a urinary tract infection, infections in the tummy, or from a medical device, such as a bladder catheter or a drip into a vein. If you are infected this way, the symptoms can be the same as for other bacteria, that is, a fever, shivering and low blood pressure.

How is VRE treated?

If you are colonised with VRE you do not need any treatment. If the VRE has caused an infection, we will consider giving you antibiotics.

How can the spread of VRE be prevented?

If we find VRE in a sample taken from you while you are in hospital, we will take some extra precautions when caring for you.

- You may be cared for in a single room with your own toilet facilities (isolation). While you are in isolation, we will ask you to avoid contact with other patients, for example, by not visiting the ward day room or going to other patients' bed areas. We will also encourage you to wash your hands before meals, and after using the toilet.
- All clinical staff must wash their hands using soap and water or alcohol hand rub before going into or leaving your room.
- Staff caring for you will wear personal protective equipment, such as, disposable gloves and aprons to prevent spreading the bacteria to other patients.

- Staff must wash their hands with soap and water following glove removal.
- We will put a sign on your door to remind everyone of the precautions they need to take.

We will ask you to:

- wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water, especially after going to the toilet
- tell staff immediately if you develop diarrhoea
- avoid touching medical devices, such as your intravenous drip, particularly at the point where they are inserted into your body or skin

What can visitors do to prevent the spread of VRE?

Visitors, relatives and carers can visit you as VRE doesn't usually present a problem for fit and healthy people. To prevent the spread of VRE to themselves, other patients or elsewhere in the hospital, visitors must:

- Visitors, relatives and carers must wash their hands using soap and water or alcohol hand rub before going into and leaving your room
- Visitors, relatives and carers must wear an apron and gloves if they are helping you with personal care
- Visitors, relatives and carers should not eat at your bed space
- Visitors, relatives and carers should not use patient bathrooms
- Visitors, relatives and carers who are feeling unwell should not visit you and should contact the nursing team for advice before visiting if they have had a recent infection or illness

What should I do when I go home?

If you are discharged from hospital with VRE, it should not affect you or your family.

- Good hand and personal hygiene, regularly changing bedsheets and not sharing towels will help prevent your family and friends from getting VRE.
- You can wash your clothing and bed linen as normal at the hottest temperature suitable for the fabric.
- You should make sure your toilets and bathrooms are regularly cleaned with your usual household cleaning products
- You can wash crockery and cutlery, etc. as normal.
- If a friend or relative is helping you with your laundry, it's important that they wash their hands with soap and water after handling the dirty laundry.
- If you have any invasive medical devices, for example a urinary catheter, you should only touch these if instructed to clean them.
- You can continue with leisure and social activities as normal.

What if I need to go back into hospital or go to hospital as an outpatient?

If you are admitted back into hospital or go to hospital for an outpatient appointment, it's important that you tell the staff caring for you that you were positive for VRE in the past.

A record of this will be included in your electronic hospital notes. This will ensure that you receive the best care to reduce the risk of you developing a VRE infection and to prevent spread to vulnerable patients. It might be helpful to take this leaflet with you to show the clinical team.

Will I always have VRE?

Once your wounds have healed or your bladder catheter has been taken out, VRE will disappear from these areas. You may still have VRE in your gut, along with 'good' bacteria, but they are unlikely to cause any problems.

If you have any questions or concerns about VRE, please contact Infection Prevention and Control team on 020 8725 2459 (Monday to Friday, 8:00am to 5:00pm). If you have any questions about your condition, please talk to one of the nursing or medical staff. You can also ask the ward manager to contact us.

Contact us

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit <https://www.stgeorges.nhs.uk/patients-and-visitors/patient-information-public/>

Additional services

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS can offer you advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or care. You can contact the PALS team on the advisory telephone line Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday from 2pm to 5pm. A Walk-in service is available: Monday, Tuesday and Thursday between 10am and 4pm Friday between 10am and 2pm.

PALS is based within the hospital in the ground floor main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough wings.

Tel: 020 8725 2453 **Email:** pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk

NHS UK

The NHS provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health.

Web: www.nhs.uk

NHS 111

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones. **Tel:** 111

Accessible

You can download accessibility guides for all our services by searching 'St George's Hospital' on the Accessible website (www.accessable.co.uk). The guides are designed to ensure everyone – including those with accessibility needs – can access our hospital and community sites with confidence.



Reference: IPC_GVRE 01 **Published:** Jan. 2026 **Review date:** Jan 2028