

# Vancomycin Resistant Enterococci (VRE)

## Patient information and frequently asked questions

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### What is Vancomycin Resistant Enterococci (VRE)?

Enterococci are bugs (bacteria) that live harmlessly in your gut and are excreted in faeces (poo). This is called colonisation. Some types of enterococci may become resistant to vancomycin, which is an antibiotic. This means the antibiotic vancomycin, and some other antibiotics, will no longer work against infection caused by the Vancomycin Resistant Enterococci (VRE). Infections that are caused by VRE are rare, but they are difficult to treat with antibiotics, so limiting the spread of this bacteria helps protect others.

### How did I get VRE?

It is difficult to know when this bacterium entered your body. However, there is an increased chance of picking up the bacteria if you have been hospitalised and on antibiotic treatment.

### How do I know if I have VRE?

VRE is generally found through testing your faeces (poo) using a rectal swab (swab of your back passageway). Healthcare staff will talk to you if testing is needed for VRE.

### How is the spread of VRE prevented?

VRE can spread within healthcare settings on surfaces, patient equipment, and from a person's hands that have been contaminated with the bacteria and not cleaned properly.

All patients should clean their hands often. This includes after using the bathroom, prior to eating, and when leaving or returning to your bedspace. Using the alcohol-based hand sanitiser is recommended, when outside a bathroom.

Staff and visitors should also clean their hands regularly with alcohol-based hand sanitiser.

Cleaning and disinfection of surfaces and equipment is also important to help stop VRE spread.

### Your care

Having VRE should not affect your care in hospital. You may need to be cared for in a single room that has its own toilet, or commode, or you may be nursed in a shared area with others who are colonized with these bacteria.

Staff will need to take extra precautions such as wearing gloves and an apron or gown for your care. There will be a sign on your door to remind people of what they need to do before coming in and leaving. While you are in a public hospital, you will be asked to stay in your room unless there are specific reasons that you need to leave your room. This is to stop accidental spread to others. Please use the hand sanitiser when you leave your room or bedspace.

### **What will happen when I leave hospital?**

If you need to go to another healthcare facility or home hospital services or get readmitted let staff know you have (or have had) VRE as precautions may still be needed. Check with the staff.

### **What happens on hospital transport?**

Well patients with VRE do not need to be transported separately. All patients should use the hand sanitiser before and after travelling in a shared transport.

### **How can I protect my whānau/family/household members from getting VRE when I go home from the hospital?**

Hand washing or using hand sanitiser is important.

Wash your hands with soap and water and dry them well, after you go to the bathroom and before preparing any food.

If people need to help you at home, remind them to wash their hands regularly too.

No special requirements are needed for washing clothes, bedding, towels, cups, plates, or cutlery. Wash these items as normal using regular washing liquids and laundry detergents. Household cleaning products can be used.

### **Will VRE go away?**

The length of time a person carries VRE will vary between people. This means you may be re-screened (tested) if you are admitted to hospital in the future.

It can be difficult to know if VRE has gone away amongst all the bacteria that live in our gut, so hospitals may take precautions for several years after your positive result.