

If you need information in a different format, such as easy read, large print, BSL, braille, email, SMS text or other communication support, please tell your ward or clinic nurse.

We try to ensure that all our information given to patients is accurate, balanced and based on the most up-to-date scientific evidence. If you would like to have details about the sources used please contact patient.information@christie.nhs.uk

For information and advice visit the cancer information centres at Withington, Oldham or Salford. Opening times can vary, please check before making a special journey.



Contact The Christie Hotline for
urgent support and specialist advice
The Christie Hotline: 0161 446 3658
Open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

Infection prevention and control

Vancomycin-resistant enterococci (VRE)

What are vancomycin-resistant enterococci?

Enterococci are a type of bacteria always found in the human body. All of us have this type of bacteria in our intestines (gut) and in some women they are also present in the vaginal area and the urinary tract. Enterococci are also often found in the environment.

Occasionally enterococci cause infections in the urinary tract, bloodstream or wounds. These infections are often treated with an antibiotic called vancomycin. Sometimes though, enterococci become resistant to this antibiotic - in other words, vancomycin does not work against them. We call this vancomycin-resistant enterococci or VRE.

Who is at risk of infection caused by VRE?

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

- have been in hospital for a long time
- have weakened immune systems, transplant patients, for example, or those in intensive care
- have undergone surgery involving the abdominal or chest area
- have medical devices such as catheters or drips which have been in place for a long time
- have been previously treated with antibiotics such as vancomycin and cefuroxime



What will happen if I am found to have VRE?

Generally speaking, if you are found to be *colonised* with VRE (in other words, you have the bacteria in or on your body, but no symptoms of infection) you will not need any treatment.

If you are found to have an *infection* caused by VRE, then we will treat you with antibiotics. Although VRE is resistant to vancomycin, there are other antibiotics which can be used. We will carry out laboratory tests to determine which drug can best treat your infection.

Will I be tested for VRE when I come into hospital?

As VRE can live in your body without causing any problems, we do not generally test for it when you come into hospital. It is sometimes detected during routine testing that may be needed while you are in hospital.

Nursing care

Whether you are cared for in a ward or a department depends if you have loose stools or diarrhoea. It has been shown that patients who are colonised with VRE and are having symptoms of diarrhoea (possibly from your cancer treatment) then you will be placed in a side room and the staff looking after you will wear special protective equipment (gloves and aprons). This is designed to protect other patients in the ward so the VRE is not spread around.

VRE does not give you diarrhoea.

Can I be cured of VRE?

VRE may go away on its own eventually, especially if you do not take antibiotics. However, as enterococci normally live in the body, you may remain a carrier indefinitely. The bacteria should not cause any problems if you are generally fit and well.

What happens when I am discharged from hospital?

If you have VRE, there is no need to take any special precautions once you are home. Just continue to wash your hands thoroughly after going

to the toilet and before preparing food and clean your bathroom regularly and thoroughly.

You should mention that you were found to have VRE to any healthcare professionals caring for you in the future. It may be that they will test you again for the bacteria and if it is still present, care for you away from other patients who are at risk of the infection. It will certainly ensure that you receive the right antibiotics if you develop infection in the future.

What can I do to help prevent the spread of VRE and other bacteria and infections?

Hand washing with soap and water is the most effective way to prevent the spread of infections in hospital. You can help us fight infection by making sure that you and your visitors clean your hands regularly, especially after using the toilet and before eating. You can also cleanse your hands with the alcohol hand rubs available on the ward.

Where can I find more information?

If you would like any further information please speak to a member of the team caring for you, who may also contact the Infection prevention and control team for you.

Infection prevention and control team

Tel: 0161 446 3731