Vancomycin Resistant Enterococci also known as VRE is a bacteria or bug which potentially can cause infections. If you have any questions or need any further information, please do not hesitate to ask the nurse or doctor looking after you. You can also request a visit from one of the Infection Prevention Nurses.

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

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

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

**Who is at risk of infections caused by VRE?**

People at an 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 those in intensive care units.
- Have undergone surgery involving the abdominal or chest area.
- Have medical devices inserted such as catheters or drips.
- Have previously been treated with antibiotics such as vancomycin.
What will happen if I am found to have VRE?

If you are found to be colonised with VRE, it means that you have the bacteria in or on your body but are displaying no symptoms of infection you will not normally need any treatment. You may however be given a special body wash to reduce the number of bacteria on your skin and so reduce the risk of infection developing.

If you are found to have an infection caused by VRE, you will be treated with antibiotics. Although VRE is resistant to vancomycin, there are a number of other antibiotics which can be used. Tests will be undertaken in the laboratory, to determine which drug can best treat your infection.

Nursing Care

What happens if you are found to have VRE will depend on whether it is likely that you or patients being nursed in the same area are at risk of getting an infection. Nursing staff may continue to care for you in the same place and the same way as before. Medical and nursing staff will monitor you closely for any signs of infection.

This will be if:

- Your body is strong enough to keep the VRE bacteria in check.
- You are being cared for on a ward where other patients are not vulnerable to infection, and so unlikely to get an infection even if the VRE bacteria is passed on to them.
- The VRE bacteria are found in your faeces or urine rather than for example in a wound, and you are not experiencing symptoms of diarrhoea.

Alternately you may be moved to a single room with separate toilet facilities. Staff will wear gloves and aprons whilst providing your care, and items of medical equipment may be reserved for your use only. All of this reduces the risk of the VRE bacteria being passed onto other patients.
This will be if:

- There are other patients around you are at high risk of developing an infection from VRE, or because you have wounds or medical devices such as a urinary catheter or a special line in place to provide you with antibiotics.
- You are being cared for in an area where the other patients are also at high risk of infection.
- The VRE bacteria are found in a part of your body which is likely to cause an infection, for example in a wound.

**Will I routinely 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 undertaken while you are in hospital.

**Can I be cured of VRE?**

VRE may go away on its own, especially if you do not take antibiotics. However as enterococci normally live in the body, you may remain a carrier indefinitely.

**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 infection. It will also ensure that you receive the right antibiotics if you develop infection in future.
What can I do to help prevent the spread of VRE and other infections?

Hands’ 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 wash their hands regularly, especially after using the toilet and before eating. You can also cleanse your hands with the alcohol hands rubs available on the ward. These should be used as well as hands washing as they are not always effective by themselves.

You will notice that staff will regularly wash their hands. They will sometimes wear disposable aprons and gloves. Also all surfaces are regularly cleaned. Again, all of which helps to prevent the spread of infection.

Where can I get more information?

Any further concerns can be discussed with hospital staff who are caring for you, or a member of the Infection Prevention Team can come and visit you.

INFECTION PREVENTION TEAM

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Community, YYF, YAB ....................... 07903 324603