

## What happens when I go home?

- When you return home it is important for you, your family and your friends to continue the good hand hygiene practices that you have been taught in hospital.
- Use your own towels and face cloths. Do not share these items with other people.
- Avoid sharing grooming items such as nail scissors, tweezers, razors and toothbrushes.
- Cover any wounds whenever possible.
- Clothing, towels, eating utensils and dishes can be washed as normal.
- **It is important that you always tell your doctor, nurse, paramedic, or other health care provider that you have VRE. This will help to prevent the future spread of VRE.**

## Where can I get further information?

You can talk to your doctor or the nursing staff. If you wish to speak with the Infection Control Department ask your nurse to contact us.

## References

1. Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care, VRE Consumer Fact Sheet, August 2013.
2. Government of South Australia, Department of Health and Ageing, Fact sheet for health care professionals: Vancomycin-resistant enterococci (VRE)



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## VRE

(Vancomycin Resistant  
Enterococci)

Patient Information



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## What is VRE?

**Enterococci** are a type of bacteria that lives normally in our gastro-intestinal tract and urinary system and usually do not cause illness.

**Vancomycin** is a strong antibiotic that will usually be effective against these bacteria. However, certain bacteria have become difficult to treat because these antibiotics are no longer effective. The bacteria have become resistant to the antibiotics. These bacteria are called **Vancomycin Resistant Enterococci (VRE)**.

## Where is the VRE?

The bacteria are usually **'COLONISED'** in patients and are often found in the gastro-intestinal tract, urinary tract, or on the skin. However, if VRE has the opportunity to be transferred to wounds or urine it can cause local infection, or even a systemic infection of the blood such as septicemia.

## What is colonisation?

Many bacteria can live on or in the body without causing disease or illness. This is called colonisation'. People can be colonised for very long periods of time, sometimes years, which is why when patients return to hospital, special infection control contact precautions are taken.

## What is infection?

When bacteria cause disease or illness this is called infection. When the infection is caused by VRE, your doctor will consider commencing treatment; if appropriate.

## Who is at risk from VRE infections?

VRE infections are more likely to occur in people who:

- Have had a long term stay in hospital such as Intensive Care
- Have a weakened immune system such as in cancer or dialysis wards
- Have been treated previously with Vancomycin or other antibiotics for a long period of time
- Have long term indwelling medical devices such as urinary catheters and central intravenous catheters

## How can VRE be spread?

VRE is spread through contact with the bacteria. This may be from direct contact with a colonized or infected person or by indirect contact with a contaminated surface such as bed linen, shared towels or toilets. To prevent the spread of VRE to the other sick patients in the hospital the nursing staff will care for you using infection control contact precautions and strict hand hygiene.

## How will my care change whilst in hospital?

- You will be managed using infection control contact precautions until you are discharged.
- A sign is placed outside your door to alert hospital staff for the need to use protective infection control contact precautions.  
This sign also alerts visitors of the need to speak with nursing staff prior to entering your room.
- The hospital staff will wear protective clothing such as gloves and an apron or gown when they enter your room.  
These items are disposed of in a separate waste bin as the staff member leaves your room.

## Good hand hygiene practices

Hand Hygiene is the most effective way to prevent **ALL** infections, including the flu and the common cold. Encourage your family and friends to maintain good hand hygiene practices every day.

## Hand Washing Alternative - Alcohol based hand rub / gel.

During your stay in hospital you may have seen the staff using an alcohol-based hand rub, as an alternative to soap and water. Alcohol-based hand rubs or gels can be used for hand hygiene as long as your hands are not visibly soiled / dirty.

## Can I still have visitors?

Yes – you can still have visitors. It is however important to know that VRE can affect people who have some long-term health problems.

Encourage your visitors to perform hand hygiene before and after they enter your room. They can use both soap and water at the wall sink in your room, or the alcohol hand rub provided inside your room. They may also be asked to wear a gown and gloves.