

VRE

Enterococci are bacteria (bugs) that live in the gut.

When enterococci become resistant to the antibiotic vancomycin, we call the bacteria vancomycin-resistant enterococci (VRE).

VRE are a type of superbug. These are bugs that are resistant to antibiotics. This means that some antibiotics that were used to treat them no longer work very well.

How you get VRE

VRE is a common bug for people who spend a lot of time in hospital. This is because lots of people carry superbugs in hospital. This makes it easier for them to spread.

There's often no way of knowing where or when you picked it up.

Most of the time VRE are harmless and do not cause infection. If they stay in your gut, they will not make you sick.

VRE can cause a serious infection if they get into your blood, kidneys, bladder or body tissues.

Preventing the spread of VRE

To stop getting and spreading VRE:

- [clean your hands often](#)
- clean your hands thoroughly after going to the toilet and before eating
- use your own soap, flannel, sponge and razor

If you are in hospital:

- limit contact with other patients and keep away from their bed space
- avoid sharing food, newspapers or other personal items with other patients
- tell staff if facilities in a hospital or clinic are not clean

⚠ Important

If you know you carry VRE, tell the doctor when you make an appointment and when you get to the surgery or hospital.

If you carry VRE, this should not get in the way of your normal home life. VRE does not spread as quickly outside of hospital. It's also less likely to harm people well enough to be at home.

If you're in hospital, you might need to stay in your own room or a ward with people who carry VRE.

You do not need to limit contact with people or tell friends or family that you have VRE.

Diagnosing VRE

You might need to give samples if you're in hospital or going into hospital.

A doctor or nurse will take a sample from your poo (faeces) or a swab sample from your bottom. This can feel uncomfortable but it is not painful.

The sample is then sent to a lab for testing. You should get the result back within a few days.

Symptoms of VRE infection

Symptoms are a lot like those of other serious infections.

Symptoms of serious VRE infection include:

- a high temperature
- aches and pain
- chills
- tiredness
- weakness
- confusion

Causes of VRE infection

VRE are more likely to cause infection in people who are already very sick.

Healthy people, including children and pregnant women, are at very low risk of VRE infection.

Things that put you at higher risk of VRE infection are:

- major surgery
- having a medical device inserted into your body, such as a catheter or IV line
- cancer treatment

Treatment of VRE infection

VRE does not always need to be treated.

If you have VRE in your body but no active infection, you do not need treatment. In some people, the VRE infection can go away on its own as your body naturally becomes stronger. This process can take a few months or even longer.

Active VRE infections are treated with an antibiotic. Your doctor or nurse can take a sample from your poo. It will be tested in a laboratory to see which antibiotic works best for you.

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