

VRE – patient information

Why have I received this information?

Tests have shown that you have a bacterium that is resistant to certain antibiotics. In this information sheet you can find out more about what this means and what to do to avoid infecting others.

What is VRE?

VRE stands for Vancomycin-Resistant Enterococcus and is a variant of enterococcus bacteria that has become resistant to certain antibiotics.

VRE can be found in the gut as part of the normal gut flora without causing illness. This is referred to as being a carrier. Just as normal bacteria, VRE can sometimes cause infections, such as urinary tract infections.

VRE bacteria do not cause more or more serious infections than normal enterococci, but treating an infection requires the use of specific types of antibiotics.

How is VRE transmitted?

VRE can be transmitted between people via hands contaminated with gut bacteria – for example, after using the toilet. You can also be infected through food and water.

A person who is only a carrier of VRE in their gut rarely spreads infection. In some situations, the amount of bacteria increases, and so does the risk of spreading infection. These are called risk factors for spreading infection.

Risk factors for spreading infection are:

- diarrhoea
- catheters
- leaks from stomas
- open wounds.

Can VRE be eliminated?

The length of time a person carries VRE in their gut can vary, from months to years. There is no telling how long you will carry the bacteria, but most people eliminate them over time. There is usually no need to check stool samples.

What should I keep in mind so as not to infect others?

The most important thing you can do is to practice good hand hygiene. If you do not have any risk factors, the risk of infection is low and you can socialise with others as usual. You can also have sex as usual. You can work as usual. Children can continue to attend preschool and school, and participate in all activities.

Special hygiene practices for those with risk factors

If you have risk factors for spreading infection, there is a higher risk of contaminating others. In such cases you should consider the following:

- Wash your hands thoroughly. Use your own towels and toiletries.
- Do not swim in pools that are also used by other people.

- Cover wounds with a dressing, and change the dressing if it soaks through.
- If you have a catheter, you should wear it under your clothes.
- Wash your hands after contact with wounds, dressings or catheters.

Do I need to tell others that I am a carrier?

You do not have to tell anyone around you that you are a carrier of VRE.

If you need to be treated with antibiotics, it is very important that you are given the right type of antibiotics. A bacterial culture should also be taken before treatment. Therefore, for your own safety, please tell your doctor that you are a carrier of VRE.

If you are admitted to a hospital, due to undergo surgery or staying in sheltered accommodation, you should tell your doctor that you are a carrier of VRE.

Infection tracing

According to the Swedish Communicable Diseases Act, you must participate in infection tracing. This means that you must provide information to healthcare professionals so they can assess when, where and how you may have been infected and whether you may have infected others.

The information you provide is confidential (under professional secrecy) and the people you mention will not know who you are.

About the infection prevention sheet

The infection prevention sheet was produced by the Swedish Association of County Medical Officers, and is valid nationally.