

PATIENT INFORMATION

Facts about Glycopeptide Resistant Enterococci (GRE) Infection

What are GRE bacteria?

GRE stands for Glycopeptide Resistant *Enterococci*. GRE's may also be referred to as a VRE (Vancomycin Resistant Enterococci).

Enterococci are bacteria that are commonly found in the bowel of normal healthy people, on the skin and in the female genital tract. Generally infection only occurs in people who are already unwell.

Certain types of antibiotics known as Glycopeptides (Vancomycin, Teicoplanin), are often used to treat infections caused by *Enterococci* bacteria. GRE infections are resistant to these types of antibiotics, so they are not an effective treatment and alternative antibiotics may be used.

What illnesses are caused by GRE?

GRE may exist in your body but not cause any harm. This is called colonisation and often persists for months and sometimes for years. The most frequent site of colonisation is the large bowel. Other sites that can become colonised include the throat, skin and vagina. GRE can cause the following infections: wound infections; bacteraemia (blood poisoning); urinary tract infections and infections of the abdomen and pelvis.

How do I know I have GRE?

Swabs are not taken routinely for all patients as there are no specific symptoms. If it is suspected, swabs will be taken from wounds and intravenous line site if present. A stool sample, urine sample or rectal swab will also be tested by the laboratory to see if the bacteria are present.

Am I at risk?

You may be at risk of developing infection caused by GRE if you:

- Have had specific antibiotic therapy with cephalosporins & glycopeptides
- Have had a prolonged stay in hospital,
- Have been admitted to intensive care or renal units.
- Immuno-compromised (e.g. receiving chemotherapy, high dose steroids).

Can it be treated?

In most cases treatment is not necessary. There are limited choices available to treat GRE infection because the organisms are resistant to a number of antibiotics. However, there are treatment options available. Your doctor will discuss this with you first.

What will happen to me now?

You may be moved to a single side room to prevent the spread of the bacteria to other susceptible patients. Staff must wear gloves and aprons when giving care and must perform hand hygiene on entering and leaving the room.

Will GRE affect the treatment of my original condition?

Your treatment in hospital will carry on as usual. You can go for any tests, physiotherapy and occupational therapy that you may need in other departments. Your meals will be served as usual.

Will GRE delay my discharge home?

No, it will not. If you are fit for discharge you will be discharged from hospital. You will be able to carry on with life as normal. Your GP will be notified by the hospital doctors.

Can I do anything to get rid of GRE?

GRE may go away on its own. However, it does tend to persist in your bowel for long periods. There are no treatments that will specifically clear it from your bowel.

Can I still have visitors?

Yes. GRE is not generally a risk to healthy people. It is safe for pregnant women and children to visit you.

Can relatives catch or spread GRE?

Generally relatives and visitors are not at risk of catching or spreading GRE. Cuts should be covered with waterproof dressings. It is essential that visitors clean their hands before and after visiting, either by washing with soap and water or by using the alcohol gels on the wards.

How can the spread of GRE be minimized?

- All staff and visitors should decontaminate hands thoroughly either by washing them with soap and water or by using an alcoholic hand rub.
- Staff should wear plastic aprons and gloves for direct care. This is not necessary for visitors.
- Patients clothing can be taken home in a plastic bag and washed in a domestic machine.
- Clinical waste (waste contaminated by body fluids) must go into the orange clinical waste bags provided.

Management of GRE in the community

At home

People affected by GRE do not present a risk to the community in general and should continue lives as normal and without restriction.

- Hand washing and personal hygiene are the most important considerations. Protective clothing is not required for family.
- At home, waste can be disposed of in normal domestic bins.
- Bed linen can be washed in a domestic washing machine on hottest temperature suitable for the fabric.

Nursing/residential home

If you are going to a residential or nursing home, GRE should not exclude you from your normal activities within the home and you would not normally need to be in isolation (rarely there may be exceptions to this, if, for example you had an infected wound you may need to be in an isolation room).

Care staff must continue to wear protective clothing (gloves and aprons) as appropriate when caring for you as this will help to prevent the spread of infection to vulnerable patient or residents.

If you have any questions about the information in this leaflet, please contact:

The Infection Control Support Department ☎ Tel. (01803) 655757

and speak to one of the Infection Control Nurses

For further assistance or to receive this information in a different format, please contact the department which created this leaflet.