

# Glycopeptide-resistant enterococci (GRE)



## Information for patients

Infection Prevention and Control



This leaflet gives you information about a type of bacteria called glycopeptide-resistant enterococcus and the infections that it can cause.

## **What are glycopeptide-resistant enterococci (GRE)?**

Enterococci are a group of bacteria that are naturally present in the intestinal tract (digestive system) of humans and normally cause no harm. These bacteria can sometimes develop resistance to the glycopeptide group of antibiotics, such as vancomycin. These bacteria are then called glycopeptide-resistant enterococci (GRE).

GRE are often also resistant to other types of antibiotics and this can make them more difficult to treat if they cause an infection.

These resistant bacteria can occasionally cause infections if they affect an area outside the bowel, such as wounds or urine or if, in more serious infections, they enter the bloodstream.

However, GRE will not cause more serious infections than other enterococci.

## **How would I know if I am a carrier of GRE?**

If a person has GRE in their bowel, this is called colonisation and the person is said to be a 'carrier'. GRE can be carried by patients, healthcare staff or visitors. Sometimes we need to screen patients for GRE. We do this mostly by taking a sample of faeces (poo). Other areas, such as wounds, may also be screened if necessary.

This screening may be done in hospital, by your GP, your practice nurse or other community healthcare workers. You will normally be informed of the result within 2 to 3 days. If you are a carrier of GRE, but have not developed an infection, you will not need to be treated.

## **Who is at risk of infection caused by GRE?**

People at an increased risk of infection caused by GRE include those who:

- Have had long hospital stays.
- Have weakened immune systems, such as Haematology patients and transplant patients.
- Have undergone surgery, particularly involving the abdominal or chest area.
- Have had inpatient stays within Intensive Care Units.
- Have medical devices such as central venous catheters (CVC), catheters or drips which have been in place for a long time.
- Have previously had long courses of antibiotic treatment, particularly of antibiotics such as vancomycin and cefuroxime.
- Have been in contact with a person carrying GRE.

## **How is GRE spread?**

GRE is most commonly spread through direct contact. As enterococci (including GRE) are found in the bowel, particular care is required when you have loose stools.

## **What will happen if I am found to have GRE?**

Generally speaking, if you are found to be colonised with GRE (in other words, you have the bacteria in or on your body, but no symptoms of infection) you will not need any treatment.

If you are found to have an infection caused by GRE, then we will treat you with antibiotics. Although GRE are resistant to vancomycin, there are other antibiotics which can be used. We will carry out laboratory tests to determine which drug is best to treat your infection.

## Nursing care

What happens if you are found to have GRE will depend on whether you, or patients near you on the ward, are at risk of infection with these bacteria. We may continue to care for you in the same place and the same way as before. This will be if:

- We think that your body is strong enough to keep the GRE bacteria in check.
- You are being cared for on a ward where other patients are generally fairly well and unlikely to get an infection even if the GRE bacteria is passed on to them.
- You don't have symptoms that increase the risk of spread of GRE such as loose stools or leaky wounds.

We will continue to keep a close eye on you for any signs of infection and may clean the area around your bed space more frequently to reduce the risk of the bacteria spreading.

We may move you from the ward into a single room with separate toilet facilities if:

- We think that you are at high risk of infection from GRE, perhaps because your immune system is weakened or because you have wounds or medical devices, such as a central or Hickman intravenous line.
- You are being cared for in an area where the other patients are also at high risk of infection.
- The GRE bacteria are found in a part of your body where they are more likely to cause infection, for example in a wound.
- You have symptoms that increase the risk of spread of GRE such as loose stools or leaky wounds.

Extra cleaning of the room will take place, staff will wear gloves and aprons when caring for you and items of medical equipment may be

reserved for your use only. All of this reduces the risk of the GRE bacteria being passed on to other patients.

## **How can I prevent GRE from spreading?**

The most important measure for you to take is to wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water, especially after going to the toilet. Inform staff immediately if you develop diarrhoea. You should avoid touching medical devices (if you have any) such as your urinary catheter tube and your intravenous drip, particularly at the point where it is inserted into your body or skin.

Visitors must wash their hands on entering and leaving the room and will be asked to wear an apron and gloves if they are helping you with personal care. Hand 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 clean your hands regularly, especially after using the toilet and before eating. You can also cleanse your hands with the alcohol hand rubs available on the ward. These should be used as well as hand washing as they are not always effective by themselves.

Staff will also regularly clean their hands, wear disposable gloves and aprons and clean surfaces regularly to help prevent the spread of infection.

## **Will I be tested for GRE when I come into hospital?**

As GRE can live in your body without causing any problems, we do not test all patients for it when they come into hospital. It is sometimes detected during routine testing that may be needed while you are in hospital. However, high risk areas, such as Haematology, screen their patients regularly for GRE as a precaution. You will be tested if you come back into hospital because we have previously found GRE in your sample.

## **Can I be cured of GRE?**

GRE may go away on its own eventually, especially if you do not take antibiotics. However, as enterococci normally live in the body, you may remain a carrier indefinitely. The bacteria should not cause any problems if you are generally fit and well.

## **What happens when I am discharged from hospital?**

Carrying GRE will not delay your discharge from hospital.

If you have GRE, there is no need to take any special precautions once you are home. You're advised to continue to wash your hands thoroughly after going to the toilet and before preparing food and to clean your bathroom regularly and thoroughly. No special measures are required with household cleaning and laundry practices.

You should mention that you were found to have GRE to any healthcare professionals caring for you in the future, for example if you are readmitted to hospital, visit a GP surgery or attend an outpatient clinic.

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 certainly ensure that you receive the right antibiotics if you develop infection in future.

If you have any questions or need any further information, please do not hesitate to ask the nurse or doctor looking after you.

## Who can I contact if I have any questions?

The doctors and nurses looking after you will be able to answer any questions you may have.

The Infection Prevention and Control Team are also available to answer any queries you may have.

The Infection Prevention and Control Team can be contacted directly on:

- **0114 271 4569** (Northern General Hospital)
- **0114 271 3120** (Royal Hallamshire Hospital, Weston Park, Jessop Wing)

## Where can I find more information?

Further information about GRE is available via the Public Health England website:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/enterococcus-species-and-glycopeptide-resistant-enterococci-gre>



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