



# Complex Bone and Joint Infection

## Virtual Acute Care Unit

**This leaflet is for patients who are discharged home following treatment for bone or joint infection and who require ongoing monitoring of symptoms and possible side effects of antibiotics.**

**VACU telephone: 0118 322 5201 (8am-8pm, Mon-Sun)**  
**Out of hours: 111 or 999**



### What is the Complex Bone and Joint Infection Virtual Acute Care Unit?

The purpose of our Virtual Acute Care Unit is to enable you to return home sooner but still receive hospital care, by remotely monitoring your symptoms and response to ongoing treatment. Your surgeon has determined that you are safe to go home with monitoring by the Virtual Acute Care Unit (VACU) team. You will receive regular telephone calls with a clinician and weekly blood tests to monitor your infection and any side effects from your antibiotic treatment. Monitoring will be needed until you have completed your course of antibiotics. You may also be given equipment, such as a pulse oximeter, temperature probe, and a blood pressure monitor, to check your readings, so we can make sure that you are improving. If you do become more unwell, the VACU team will ensure you receive appropriate and timely treatment.

### What will happen after I go home?

**Once you return home, a member of the VACU team will call to:**

- Check your symptoms and to check for any side effects of your treatment. This usually consists of a call once a week but may be more if we need to monitor you more closely.
- To arrange an appointment slot for weekly blood tests to monitor your infection markers.
- To update you with the results of your blood tests.
- If you have not heard from us by 1pm on the first day after arriving home, call our VACU phone number (0118 322 5201) 8am- 8pm Mon-Sun. You can also call this number if you have any questions such as when your stitches or clips need to be removed.

### Your medications

- Please read the patient information leaflet from your antibiotics packet, which will explain possible side effects to look out for. The VACU team clinician will also ask about these side effects during the regular telephone calls.

- It is important that you take your medications exactly as prescribed to ensure effective treatment of the bacteria that has infected the joint.
- If you are struggling with keeping anything down because you feel nauseous, let us know and we may need to prescribe anti-sickness medication or find an alternative antibiotic after discussion with the consultant microbiologist (doctor specialising in the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of infectious diseases).
- Even if you start to feel better, you should still finish your course of antibiotics.

## Your blood thinning medications

### General considerations

- Blood thinners will **increase your risk of bleeding**, so try to avoid injuries e.g. falls.
- Blood thinners can **interact with other medications** (including over-the-counter supplements), so speak to your GP or VACU staff prior to making any changes.
- Blood thinners may not be safe in pregnancy, so speak to your doctor if you are pregnant or are planning on becoming pregnant.

### For Tinzaparin injections

- Inject it under the skin.
- Inject this at roughly the same time every day.
- Vary the injection site daily.
- Contact your local council to arrange collection of a full sharps bin.

### For Warfarin

- Your warfarin dose will be depend upon your individual blood test results (INR).
- Please follow any guidance you received upon discharge from hospital, regarding where and when to have a repeat blood test.

## Alarm signs and what to do next

Seek help via our Virtual Acute Care Unit number, 111 or 999 if you develop the following:

- **Worsening pain** in the affected joint or bone.
- **Inability to move the joint.**
- **Swelling, warmth and joint redness.**
- Any **new or worsening ooze** from the wound.
- Any **new or worsening pain, redness or heat** of the wound.
- **Fever.**
- **Chills.**
- If your oxygen saturations are **persistently 94% or less.**
- If the top number of your blood pressure is **persistently less than 100.**
- If your heart rate is **persistently greater than 110.**

During working hours, you can also call our Virtual Acute Care Unit number if you are not sure.

**If you have any questions or concerns, do not hesitate to call our Virtual Acute Care Unit number – we are happy to help as we know this can be very stressful and scary.**

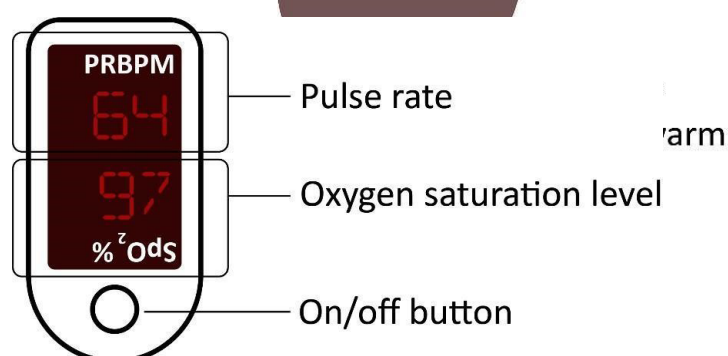
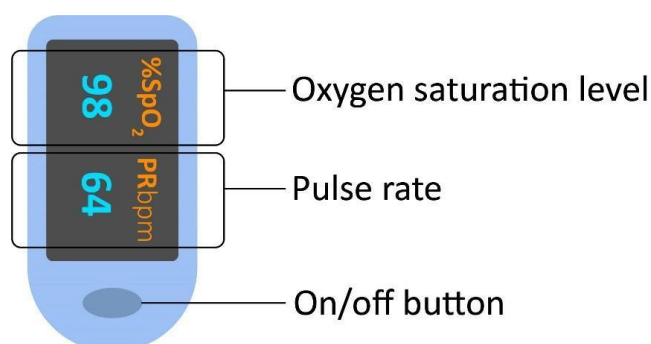
**0118 322 5201**

### Instructions for using the equipment

The VACU team may give you some equipment which may include a blood pressure monitor, a sensor and strap that also monitors your temperature, oxygen saturations, and pulse. We will show you how to use all this equipment before you leave hospital.

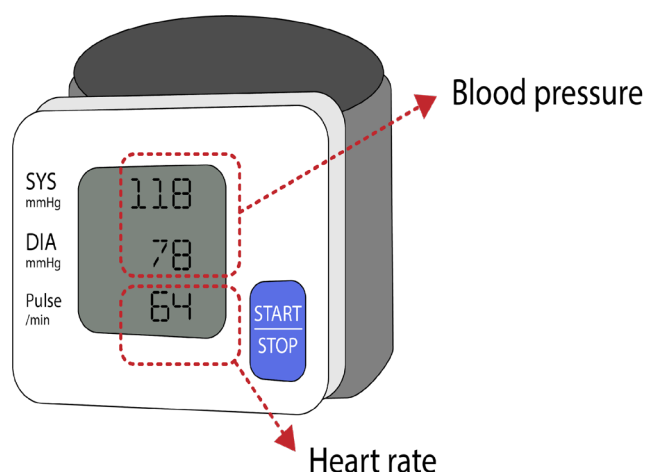
### Instructions for using your pulse oximeter at home

- Make sure your fingers are warm.
- Remove any nail varnish before attaching the probe.
- Clip the oximeter onto your finger.
- Sit up straight and rest for a few minutes before taking measurements.
- After 5–10 seconds, the probe will give you two different numbers – an oxygen saturation level (abbreviated to SpO<sub>2</sub>) and a pulse rate (abbreviated to PR or BPM) – we are interested in both readings.



### Using your blood pressure monitor at home

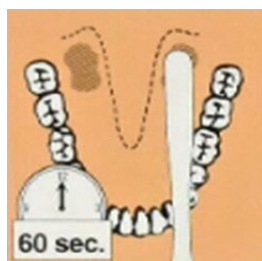
- Ensure you are seated comfortably and rest for a few minutes before taking the readings.
- Attach the cuff to your wrist, against your skin (and not over clothing).
- Press the START/STOP button to start measuring your blood pressure – the cuff will pump up, which may feel a bit uncomfortable for a short period.
- The monitor will give you three readings.
- The top two readings are your blood pressure.
- The bottom number is your heart rate.
- You can view the full instruction manual by searching online for “Omron RS1 manual”.



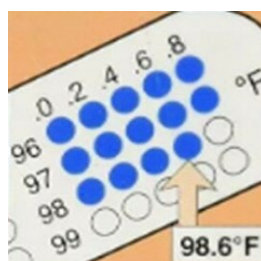
## Using your temperature probe



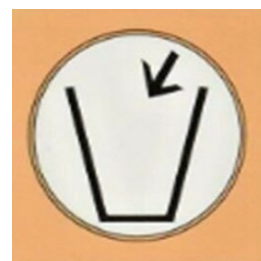
1. Remove thermometer from wrapper.



2. Place under tongue as far back as possible. Close your mouth for 60 seconds.



3. Remove. Wait approximately 10 seconds. Some blue dots may disappear as device "locks in" for accuracy. Read temperature indicated by last blue dot.

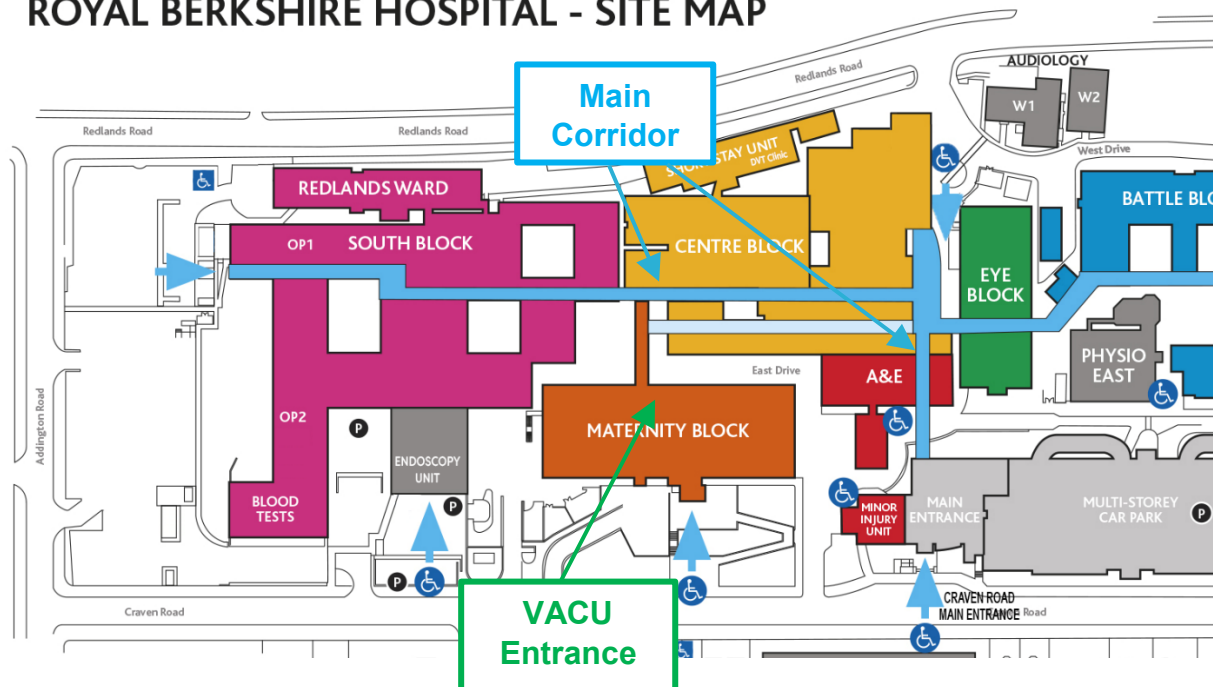


4. Record temperature and discard thermometer.

## Returning the devices

Once you have recovered, please return all the devices to the drop-off box located in the Virtual Acute Care Unit (VACU) in **Maternity Block, level 2** – see map below. Open Mon-Sun, 8am-8pm. **Please do not return them to the Emergency Department (A&E).**

### ROYAL BERKSHIRE HOSPITAL - SITE MAP



To find out more about our Trust visit [www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk](http://www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk)

**Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.**

RBFT Virtual Acute Care Unit

Reviewed: October 2024. Next review due: October 2026.

## Recording your oxygen levels, heart rate, temperature, and blood pressure

Using the table below, record your oxygen levels, heart rate, blood pressure and temperature four times a day:

DATE								
Morning	Oxygen							
	Heart rate							
	Blood pressure							
	Temperature							
Midday	Oxygen							
	Heart rate							
	Blood pressure							
	Temperature							
Afternoon	Oxygen							
	Heart rate							
	Blood pressure							
	Temperature							
Evening	Oxygen							
	Heart rate							
	Blood pressure							
	Temperature							