



Heart failure: Virtual Acute Care Unit

If you are going home after treatment for heart failure and are going to get short-term support from the Virtual Acute Care Unit (VACU), please read this leaflet. It explains how VACU will monitor your symptoms, treatment and recovery.

VACU telephone: 0118 322 5201 (8am-8pm, Mon-Sun)
VACU email rbb-tr.vhs@nhs.net
Out of hours: 111 or 999



What is the Virtual Acute Care Unit?

- VACU is a hospital service that helps you recover safely at home, after an illness or flare-up, while still having access to hospital support if you need it. This may reduce the chance of complications or needing to return to hospital
- Your clinician says you are well enough to leave hospital safely, but that you need short-term follow-up from the healthcare team.
- The follow-up you receive will depend on your condition and how you are recovering. Some patients may have individual needs for daily hospital treatment or monitoring at first.
- You will receive regular telephone calls with a clinician and will need to return to our unit for blood tests until your levels are satisfactory. If you do become more unwell, the VACU team will ensure you receive appropriate and timely treatment.

What is heart failure?

Heart failure does not mean the heart has stopped working. It means your heart is weaker than normal and cannot pump blood around your body as effectively. This can lead to:

- Breathlessness
- Coughing
- Swelling in your legs or tummy (fluid build-up)
- Fatigue or low energy
- Needing to sleep propped up on pillows

Heart failure is a long-term condition but with the right care and treatment, symptoms can be managed and quality of life improved.

What will happen after I go home?

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

- Review your symptoms (by phone or in person, depending on your needs).
- Check your readings such as blood pressure, heart rate, oxygen levels, and weight.

We can provide any equipment you need for this and instructions are below.

- Arrange blood tests when needed to monitor your kidney function and response to treatment.

***Please be note that our call to you may come from a withheld or unknown number.**

Your medications

- Heart failure is usually treated with medicines that help your heart work more effectively and reduce extra fluid in the body.
- Your treatment will be tailored to you, and your team will explain what each medicine is for.
- Some people may be prescribed a diuretic (also known as a “water tablet”). This helps your body get rid of extra fluid by making you pee more often. This is normal and shows the medicine is working.

If you need a midline

Sometimes, patients with heart failure need stronger medicines through a drip (into a vein), such as strong diuretics to reduce fluid build-up. For this, we may insert a small, soft tube called a midline into a vein in your upper arm.

This means:

- You can receive hospital-level treatment with fewer separate needles, although you will need to visit our clinic daily for medication.
- It is more comfortable and safer for longer treatments.
- The line is looked after by trained staff and removed once you no longer need it.

Alarm signs and what to do next

Seek help via our VACU number, 111 or 999 in the following cases:

- Increased shortness of breath or difficulty breathing.
- Sudden weight gain (e.g., more than 2kg in 3 days).
- Worsening swelling in your legs, ankles, or abdomen
- Extreme tiredness or dizziness.

For emergencies (chest pain or severe breathing problems), call 999.

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

Are you a carer?

Carers give unpaid care to a family member, partner or friend who needs help because of their illness, frailty, disability, a mental health problem or an addiction and cannot cope without their support. The Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust is committed to recognising their valuable role. If you would like any additional support or information, please speak to our team or visit our Carers Support webpage. www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk/patients-and-visitors/accessible-information-and-reasonable-adjustments/carers-support

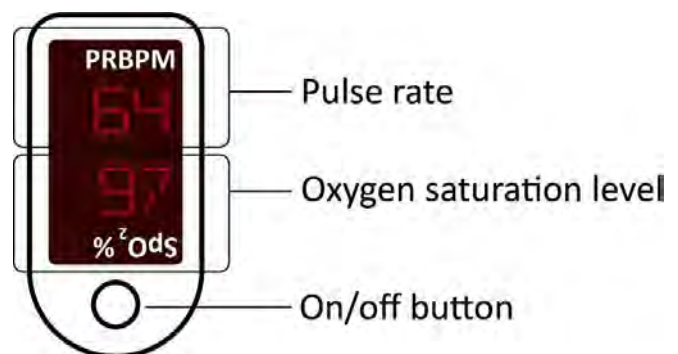
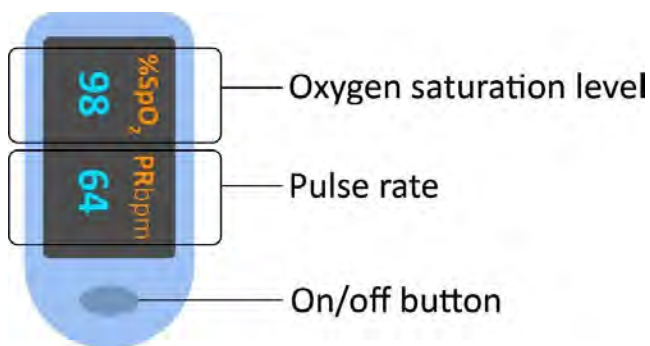
Instructions for using the equipment

The VACU team may give you some equipment to use at home. This may include a pulse oximeter, a blood pressure monitor and a temperature probe.

The clinician looking after you will let you know what readings they need, and how often. You can write these down, and let us know when we phone you.

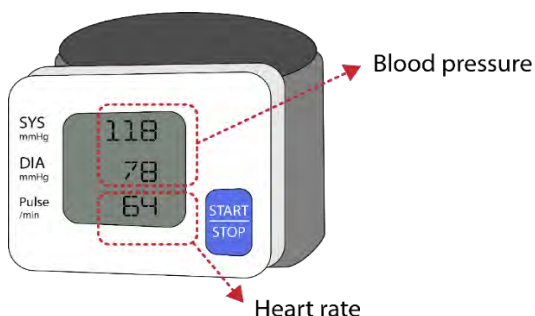
Instructions for using your pulse oximeter at home

- 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 SpO₂) and a pulse rate (abbreviated to PR or BPM) – we are interested in both readings.

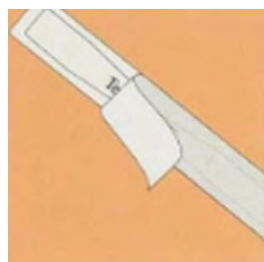


Using your blood pressure monitor at home

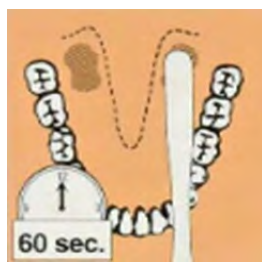
- Ensure you are seated comfortably and rest for a few minutes before taking the readings.
- Attach the cuff to your upper arm, against your skin (and not over clothing).
- Press the START/STOP button to start measuring your blood pressure – the cuff will pump up, which may feel a bit uncomfortable for 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”.



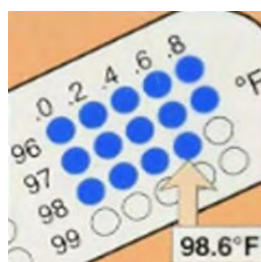
Using your temperature probe



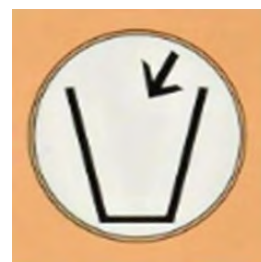
1. Remove thermometer from wrapper.



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.



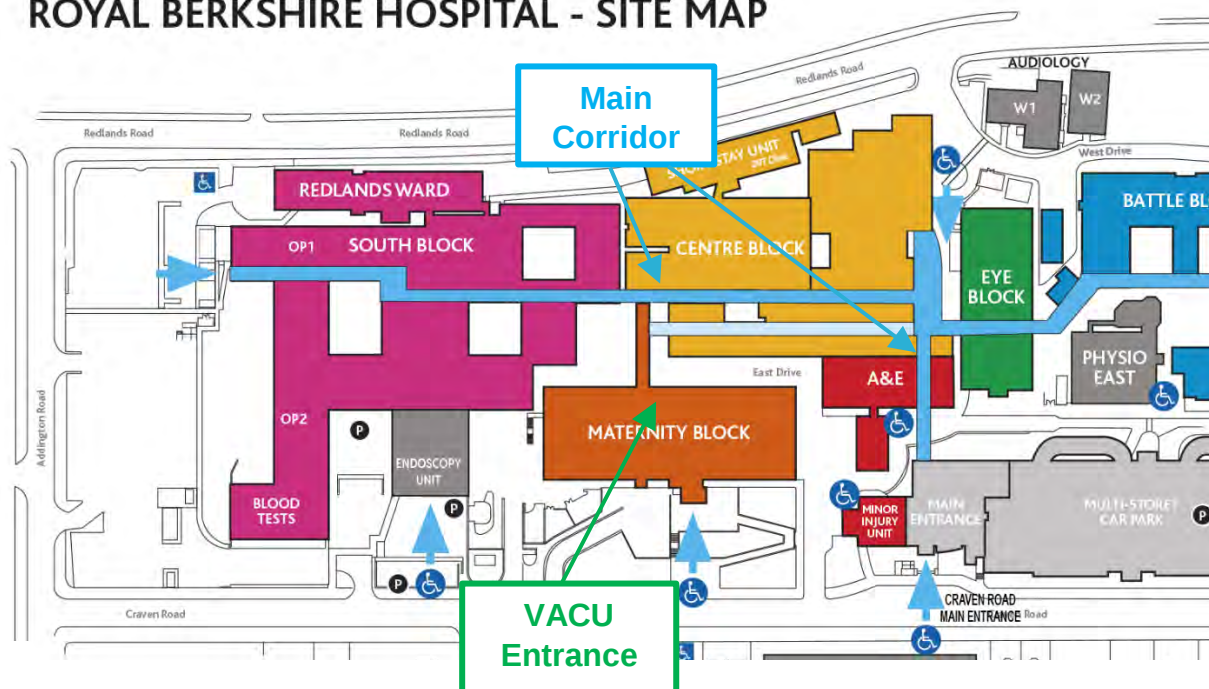
4. Record temperature and discard thermometer.

Returning the devices

Once you have recovered, please return any devices VACU has provided to the drop-off box located in the Virtual Acute Care Unit 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

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

RBFT Virtual Acute Care Unit, June 2026. Next review due: June 2028.