

FAQs

(frequently asked questions)

about “Vancomycin-Resistant Enterococci”

What is VRE?

Enterococci are bacteria that are normally present in the human intestines and in the female genital tract and are often found in the environment. These Bacteria can sometimes cause infections. Vancomycin is an antibiotic that is often used to treat infections caused by enterococci. In some cases, enterococci have become resistant to vancomycin and are called vancomycin-resistant enterococci or VRE. Most VRE infections occur in people in hospitals.

Who is most likely to get a VRE infection?

The following persons are at increased risk of becoming infected with VRE:

- People who have been previously treated with the antibiotic vancomycin or other antibiotics for long periods of time.
- People who are hospitalized, particularly when they receive antibiotic treatment for long periods of time.
- People with weakened immune systems such as patients in Intensive Care Units, or in cancer or transplant wards.
- People who have undergone surgical procedures such as abdominal or chest surgery.
- People with medical devices that stay in for some time such as urinary catheters or central intravenous (IV) catheters.
- People who are colonized with VRE.

How do I get a VRE infection?

VRE is often passed from person to person by the hands of caregivers. VRE can get onto a caregiver's hands after they have contact with other people with VRE or after contact with contaminated surfaces. VRE can also be spread directly to people after they touch surfaces that are contaminated with VRE. VRE is not usually spread through the air by coughing or sneezing.

Can VRE infections be treated?

People who are colonized (bacteria are present, but have no symptoms of an infection) with VRE do not usually need treatment. Most VRE infections can be treated with antibiotics other than vancomycin. Laboratory testing of the VRE can determine which antibiotics will work. For people who get VRE infections in their bladder and have urinary catheters, removal of the catheter when it is no longer needed may also help get rid of the infection.

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What are some of the things that hospitals are doing to prevent VRE infections?

To prevent VRE infections, doctors, nurses, and other healthcare providers:

- Clean their hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub before and after caring for every patient.
- Carefully clean hospital rooms and medical equipment.
- Use Contact Precautions when caring for patients with VRE. Contact Precautions mean:
- Whenever possible, patients with VRE will have a single room or will share a room only with someone else who also has VRE.
- Healthcare providers will put on gloves and wear a gown over their clothing while taking care of patients with VRE.
- Visitors may also be asked to wear a gown and gloves.
- When leaving the room, hospital providers and visitors remove their gown and gloves and clean their hands.
- Patients on Contact Precautions are asked to stay in their hospital rooms as much as possible. They should not go to common areas, such as the gift shop or cafeteria. They may go to other areas of the hospital for treatments and tests.

If you do not see your providers clean their hands, please ask them to do so.

How may I prevent the spread of VRE?

If you or someone in your household has VRE, the following are some things you can do to prevent the spread of VRE:

- Keep your hands clean. Always wash your hands thoroughly after using the bathroom and before preparing food. Clean your hands after contact with persons who have VRE. Wash with soap and water (particularly when visibly soiled) or use an alcohol-based hand rubs.
- Frequently clean areas of your home such as your bathroom that may become contaminated with VRE.
- Wear gloves if you may come in contact with body fluids that may contain VRE, such as stool or bandages from infected wounds. Always wash your hands after removing gloves.

If you have VRE, be sure to tell healthcare providers caring for you that you have VRE so that they are aware of your infection. Special precautions are used to help prevent the spread of VRE to others.

If you have questions, please ask your doctor or nurse.

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