

VRE (Vancomycin-Resistant Enterococcus)

What is VRE?

VRE is a type of bacteria that does not respond to the usual antibiotics.

Enterococcus is a bacteria normally found in the intestines and the female genital tract. Sometimes it can cause an infection. The infection is usually treated with the antibiotic **vancomycin**. If the enterococcus bacteria have become resistant to vancomycin, it's called VRE. Most VRE infections occur in people in hospitals.

Who is at risk for VRE?

People in good health are not usually at risk for VRE. It most often occurs in people who:

- Have been treated with multiple antibiotics over long periods of time.
- Have had long or repeated stays in the hospital.
- Have weakened immune systems.
- Have had surgical procedures such as abdominal or chest surgery.
- Have medical devices that stay in for a long time, such as urinary catheters.

What if I have VRE?

If your doctor suspects that you have VRE, he or she will send a sample of your blood, wound drainage, urine, or stool to a lab. If you do have VRE, it can exist in your body in two ways:

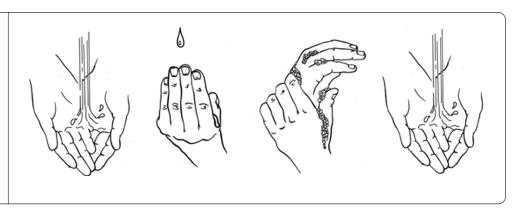
- **Colonization** means that VRE are present in your body, but not causing illness. If you do not have symptoms, you usually do not need treatment.
- Infection means that the VRE are making you ill.
 They may cause infections in your urinary tract, bloodstream, or wounds.

If you have an infection, the lab will grow the bacteria and test to see which kinds of antibiotics will kill it. This test may take several days.

What if it goes untreated?

If it goes untreated, VRE can lead to diseases of the urinary tract, bloodstream, heart valves, and brain (meningitis). It can also lead to serious infections in open wounds.

Both you and your caregivers need to wash your hands often to keep VRE from spreading to others. You can also clean your hands with alcoholbased hand sanitizers.



How does VRE spread?

VRE is usually spread from one person to another by casual contact or on contaminated objects. It is not spread through the air by coughing or sneezing.

How is it kept from spreading?

Even if your VRE is being treated, the bacteria can still spread to other people. You and your caregivers should take these precautions to keep VRE from spreading:

- In the hospital. If you have VRE, you will be put in a private room. Healthcare providers will wear gloves when they enter your room and gowns when caring for you. As usual, they will wash their hands before and after they treat you.
- Visitors to your hospital room. If you have VRE, you can still receive visitors who are healthy, including children. They do not need to wear gloves and gowns unless they are helping with your care. But they should take these precautions:
 - Wash their hands thoroughly before leaving your room.
 - Not visit other patients or patient areas during this visit.
 - Launder their clothing after visiting you.

- **At home.** If you have VRE, your caregivers at home need to take these precautions:
 - After each contact with you, wash hands thoroughly with soap and water, or with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Towels used for drying hands should be used only once.
 - Frequently clean your room and personal items with a disinfectant. Wash linens regularly, and when soiled.
 - Wear gloves when touching any body fluids such as blood, stool, urine, wound drainage, or used bandages. Wash hands after removing the gloves.
 - Tell any healthcare providers caring for you that you have VRE. They will take special precautions to keep the VRE from spreading to others.

Is it safe to be in the same room with a person who has VRE?

People in good health, including children, have very low risk of being infected with VRE. They can be in the same room with you, and even casually touch or hug you. They should wash their hands before leaving your room.

People who are very ill or who have weak immune systems should limit their physical contact with you to no more than casual touching. They should wash their hands after any contact with you.