

VRE: (*Vancomycin-Resistant Enterococcus*)

What is VRE?

VRE is an infection typically affecting those in hospitals. It is caused by **enterococcus** [en-tehr-oh-KOK-uhs], a bacteria normally found in the intestines and the female genital tract. Sometimes it can cause an infection. This kind of infection is usually treated with the antibiotic **vancomycin** [van-kuh-MAHY-sin]. If the enterococcus bacteria become resistant to vancomycin, the infection is called **vancomycin-resistant enterococcus or VRE**.

VRE can exist in your body in 2 ways:

- 1 **Colonization** means that VRE bacteria are present in your body but not causing illness.
- 2 **Infection** means that the VRE bacteria are making you ill. They may cause infections in your urinary tract, bloodstream, or wounds.

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:

- Taken multiple antibiotics for some time
- Had a long or repeated stay in the hospital

- A weakened immune system
- Had surgical procedures like abdominal or chest surgery
- Had a urinary catheter or other medical device for a long time.

How does VRE spread?

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

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

However, those who are very ill or who have weak immune systems should limit their physical contact and wash their hands after ANY contact with you.

Preventing the spread of VRE is very important, both in the hospital (see below) and at home (see page 2).

Preventing VRE infections IN THE HOSPITAL

YOUR HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS will do these things:

- Put any patient with VRE in a **private room**.
- **Clean their hands** before and after caring for each patient (see page 2).
- **Wear gloves and a gown** over their clothing while caring for you and remove them before leaving your room.
- **Clean all hospital rooms and medical equipment** carefully and often.

YOU can do these things:

- **Make sure all healthcare providers follow guidelines for handwashing** before and after they care for you (see page 2). They should also wear gloves and gowns while in your room.
- **Wash your own hands often**, especially after **using the bathroom and before eating**.
- **Make sure visitors:**
 - Wash their hands with soap and water (or a hand sanitizer) before leaving your room (see page 2).
 - Do NOT visit other patients or patient areas.

Even if you are being treated for VRE, the bacteria can still spread to other people.

Preventing VRE infections AT HOME

- **Make sure your caregivers at home:**
 - **Wash hands thoroughly** with soap and water or with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer (see information at right) after any contact with you.
 - Use towels for drying hands **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 (see instructions at right).
- **Tell any health care provider caring for you that you have VRE**, so they can take special precautions to keep the VRE from spreading to others.

How is VRE diagnosed?

If your doctor suspects that you have VRE, they will send a sample of your blood, wound drainage, urine, or stool to a lab.

- **If you have colonization (no symptoms)**, you usually do not need treatment.
- **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.

How is VRE treated?

Based on your lab tests, doctors will prescribe other antibiotics to treat your VRE infection. 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.

The information in this fact sheet is cosponsored by: Society of Healthcare Epidemiology of America (SHEA), Infectious Disease Society of America (IDSA), American Hospital Association (AHA), Association for Practitioners in Infection Control (APIC), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the Joint Commission.



Hand washing with soap and water

-  1 Wet hands with warm, running water.
-  2 Apply liquid soap or use a clean bar of soap. Lather well.
-  3 Rub your hands together vigorously for at least 15 to 20 seconds. Be sure to scrub all surfaces of your hands and fingers.
-  4 Rinse well. Dry your hands with a clean or disposable towel.
-  5 Use a towel to turn off the faucet.

Hand washing with a hand sanitizer

-  1 Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Apply it to the palm of your hand. Read the label to see how much to apply.
-  2 Be sure to cover all surfaces of your hands and fingers. Rub your hands together until they are dry.

People can become infected if they touch surfaces that are contaminated with germs. Healthcare providers can spread the germs if they don't wash their hands often enough. If you don't see your healthcare providers clean their hands, please ask them to do so.

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