

# Vancomycin-resistant Enterococci (VRE)

## What is Vancomycin-resistant Enterococci (VRE)?

Enterococci are bacteria (germs) commonly found in the intestines, women's genital tracts, and in the environment. These bacteria can sometimes cause infections.

Vancomycin is an antibiotic (medicine) used to treat infections caused by enterococci. The germs, however, can become resistant to the vancomycin so the medicine no longer works.

When this happens, the bacteria is called vancomycin-resistant enterococci (VRE).

## What Types of Infections Does VRE Cause?

VRE can live in the human body without causing disease. (This is known as colonization.) It can sometimes cause infections in the urine, the blood, or in wounds.

## Who Usually Gets VRE Infections?

You may be at an increased risk of becoming infected with VRE if you:

- have been treated with vancomycin or other antibiotics for a long time
- have had a hospital stay (especially if you were on antibiotics for a long time)
- have a weakened immune system and you need to stay in a hospital intensive care unit, cancer unit or transplant unit
- had surgery, such as to your abdomen (belly) or chest or have short-term medical devices in your body (such as catheters)

- have a medical device that stays in for a while, such as a urinary catheter or central venous catheter
- are colonized with VRE.

## How is VRE Spread?

VRE can be spread by contact with:

- an infected person
- unwashed hands that have the VRE germs on them
- equipment or surfaces that have the germs on them.

VRE can be spread as long as a person has the germ or is infected (sick). (VRE is **not** spread through the air by coughing or sneezing.)

To protect others, people who test positive for VRE need to stay on contact precautions during their hospital stay.

There are certain risk factors (such as taking antibiotics or staying in a health care facility) that may keep you from being screened or taken off contact precautions.

## What are the Symptoms of VRE?

When an infection occurs, the symptoms depend on the site of the infection. For example, if a VRE infection is in a wound, the site may be red, warm and have pus-like drainage.

*(over)*

## How is VRE Treated?

If you have the VRE germs but you do not have symptoms, you do not need to be treated.

Most VRE infections can be treated with a medicine other than vancomycin. There are lab tests that can be done that will tell your doctor which medicines will work.

By taking antibiotic medicine, if the infection is in your bladder and you have a urinary catheter, removing the catheter when you don't need it will help get rid of the infection.

## How is VRE Confirmed?

A test of your stool, rectum, or part of your body that might be infected will show if there is a VRE infection.

## How Can You Prevent the Spread of VRE at Home?

- Cleanse your hands well and often with soap and warm water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, especially after changing bandages or touching the infection area.
  - Anyone who has close contact with you should wash their hands.
  - Follow the correct method for handwashing with soap and water. Use friction to all hand surfaces (including under the fingernails) for 10 to 15 seconds. Rinse well and pat your hands dry.
- Use gloves when touching any wounds or handling body fluids.
- Cover your wound.
  - Keep wounds that are draining or that have pus covered with clean, dry bandages.
  - Follow your health care provider's instructions on proper wound care.

- Avoid sharing personal items (such as towels, washcloths, razors or clothing).
- Change bed linens when soiled on a regular basis.
- Throw away items soiled with body fluids (dressings, diapers, used gloves) by tying them in a plastic bag.
- Wash your hands after using the toilet.
- When you are cleaning:
  - Use a household disinfectant.
  - Wash dishes and utensils as usual.
  - Clean work surfaces with a household disinfectant before preparing food.
  - Clean the kitchen often with a household disinfectant, especially surfaces you touch (such as counter tops, the refrigerator door, drawer handles and the telephone receiver).
- When you are laundering items soiled with body fluids or items that may have had contact with the wound or bandage:
  - Use a standard laundry detergent and hot water. Dry clothes in a hot dryer.
- Tell any health care provider that you have or had VRE.

**Information adapted from the Centers from Disease Control and Prevention.**