

VANCOMYCIN RESISTANT ENTEROCOCCUS (VRE)

Fact Sheet for Patients

WHAT IS VRE?

Enterococci are germs that live in the gastrointestinal tract (bowels) of most individuals and generally do not cause harm (this is termed “colonization”). Vancomycin-resistant enterococci (VRE) are strains of enterococci that are resistant to the antibiotic vancomycin. If a person has an infection caused by VRE, such as a urinary tract infection or blood infection, it may be more difficult to treat.

HOW IS VRE SPREAD?

VRE is spread from one person to another by contact, usually on the hands of caregivers. VRE can be present on the caregiver’s hands either from touching contaminated material excreted by an infected person or from touching articles soiled by feces. VRE can survive well on hands and can survive for weeks on inanimate objects such as toilet seats, taps, door handles, bedrails, furniture and bedpans. VRE is easy to kill with the proper use of disinfectants and good hand hygiene.

WHAT SPECIAL PRECAUTIONS ARE REQUIRED FOR VRE?

It is important that special precautions are taken to stop VRE from spreading to other patients in the hospital. These precautions include:

- Single room accommodation (the door can remain open)
- A long-sleeved gown and gloves must be worn by everyone who cares for you
- A sign may be placed on your door to remind others who enter your room about the special precautions
- The room and the equipment used in the room will be cleaned and disinfected regularly
- Everyone who leaves your room must clean their hands well
- You must wash your hands before you leave your room

WHAT ABOUT FAMILY/VISITORS?

Your family and visitors should not assist other patients with their personal care as this may cause the germ to spread. They may be required to wear a long-sleeved gown and gloves while in your room. Before leaving your room, visitors must remove the gloves and gown and dispose of them in the garbage container and the linen hamper located in your room. Then they must clean their hands.

GOOD HAND HYGIENE PRACTICES

Remind all staff and visitors to practice good hand hygiene before and after they touch you. Ask your nurse or doctor to demonstrate proper hand hygiene techniques (15 seconds of soap and running water OR waterless alcohol hand rub until hands are dry).

You need to clean your hands:

- After using the bathroom
- After blowing your nose
- Before eating and drinking
- Before and after you touch your dressing or wounds
- When your hands are visibly dirty (soiled)
- Before you leave your room

WHAT WILL HAPPEN AT HOME?

If you have VRE at the time of discharge from hospital, the chance of spreading the germ to your family is small. But, we do recommend you practice the following:

- Everyone who might help you with your personal hygiene or with going to the toilet should wash their hands after contact with you.
- Wash your hands before you make any food and before you eat. This practice should be followed by everyone in the household.
- Wash your hands well after using the toilet. Make sure others that use the bathroom wash their hands well afterwards.
- Clothing may be laundered in the same manner as the rest of the household laundry.
- No special cleaning of furniture or items (e.g. dishes) in the home is required.
- If you share a bathroom at home, clean the toilet and sink at least weekly with a germicidal cleanser.
- Always tell your physician, paramedics, nurses or other care providers that you have VRE. This helps prevent spread to others.