

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. These precautions include:

- A long-sleeved gown and gloves must be worn by health care workers who provide direct care to you
- The room and the equipment used will be cleaned and disinfected regularly
- Everyone who interacts with you must clean their hands well

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

WHAT WILL HAPPEN AT HOME?

If you have VRE 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 care or with going to the toilet should wash their hands after contact with you
- Clothing may be laundered in the same manner as the rest of the household laundry
- It is encouraged to maintain a clean home, free from dust and visible soil. 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 disinfectant
- Always tell your physician, paramedics, nurses or other care providers that you have VRE. This helps prevent spread to others.

Ask your health care provider if you require additional information