

*You can help
stop the spread
of VRE by
keeping your
hands clean.*

Vancomycin-Resistant Enterococci

Your physician or nurse has told you that you have vancomycin-resistant enterococci (VRE). This brochure will answer some of the most common questions about VRE.

What it is

VRE are bacteria that are resistant to the antibiotic vancomycin.

People who have VRE do not always get an infection, but they can still spread VRE to others because they do not know they have it. They may have VRE and have no symptoms, but the bacteria is present and not causing any harm (colonization). These people are known as carriers. They are colonized with VRE, but do not have an infection.

In the hospital, it is very important to know if a patient has VRE so the care team can take precautions to prevent it spreading to staff and other patients.

How VRE spreads

VRE is not in the air. It is spread by direct contact or touching the bacteria on:

- A person who is a carrier or infected with VRE
- Surfaces or equipment that are contaminated with VRE, including phones, bedside tables, home thermometers, bathroom fixtures and blood pressure cuffs

VRE can cause infections in your urinary tract, bloodstream or wounds. There are only certain antibiotics to treat VRE infections. Whether you carry VRE or are infected with it, it is spread the same way — through contact.

Special precautions taken by hospital staff

If you are on a high-risk unit, the care team will follow contact precautions. This means all hospital staff will wear gowns and gloves when they come into your room. (You may leave your door open.) These steps help prevent VRE from spreading.

The care team will follow these precautions until you have 3 rectal swabs or 2 stool samples with a negative test result for VRE. They will take these tests at least 1 week apart. You must be off antibiotics. This policy is based on Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines. If you have a low white blood cell count, it is unlikely that the test results will be negative.

Visitor guidelines

You may have visitors. Your visitors do not need to wear a gown and gloves because they are not going into other patient rooms. However, they do need to clean their hands with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand rub before and after any contact with you or your surroundings.

How to prevent the spread of VRE at home

Keeping your hands clean is the most important thing you can do to prevent infection and the spread of VRE. You may use soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub. To wash your hands with soap and water, rub for at least 20 seconds. Be sure to wash your hands with soap and water when they are visibly soiled. Always clean your hands well:

- Before and after meals
- While preparing meals
- After coughing or sneezing
- After using the bathroom

Wear gloves if you think you can come in contact with body fluids that may contain VRE, such as stool or dressings from infected wounds. Always clean your hands after taking your gloves off.

If you have any questions or concerns, please ask your physician or nurse.