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Vancomycin Resistant Enterococcus (VRE)

What is Vancomycin-resistant *Enterococcus*?

Vancomycin is an antibiotic used to treat certain infections, including those caused by most strains of *Enterococcus*. Enterococci are bacteria found normally in the intestinal tract. When Vancomycin is unable to kill these bacteria, the bacteria are called VRE. VRE is very hardy. It can survive on hard surfaces for 7-10 days and on hands for hours. Good hand hygiene is the best way to stop the spread of VRE.

Can VRE be harmful?

VRE doesn't usually pose a risk to healthy people, but it can cause infection in those who are already weak from illness.

How can VRE be spread?

VRE can be spread to others by person-to-person contact. It is mainly spread by contact with unwashed hands or dirty gloves. Handling bedpans, toilet rims, or other items that have been contaminated with VRE can also spread it. It is mainly spread through the fecal/oral route. It is not passed through the air.

VRE are hardy organisms that can survive easily outside the body. VRE has been found in hospitals, long term care facilities, and in the community.

Special precautions are needed in order to prevent the spread of the germ to other patients in the hospital who are ill and therefore most likely to develop an infection. There are few available antibiotics effective enough to treat infections caused by VRE.

What can I expect in the hospital if I am diagnosed with VRE?

During your hospital stay you will be required to stay in your room and will be cared for using the following Contact Precautions:

- You will have a private room with signage placed outside your room, to remind everyone of the special precautions you require.
- All staff and visitors who come into your room will wear a gown and gloves.
- Equipment used in your daily care will remain in your room.
- **NO** items or equipment will be removed from your room without being cleaned.
- You will be taught how to wash your hands with a hand sanitizer. You must wash your hands with soap and water after using the toilet. Avoid touching open sores.
- It is very important for all staff and visitors to carefully remove their gowns and gloves and perform hand hygiene when they leave your room.
- Your room will be specially cleaned twice daily to remove the VRE germs.
- If you need to go to another part of the hospital for tests or treatment, you must use the hand sanitizer before leaving your room and put on a fresh clean patient gown.

Will this go away?

Most people who test positive for VRE, but do not develop an infection will usually eliminate the VRE bacteria over time on their own. Your doctor may order special antibiotics to treat your infection from VRE.

Cultures may be taken again periodically to see if the germ has gone.

What do I need to do at home?

If you are infected or colonized with VRE at the time of discharge from hospital, the chance of spreading the bacteria to your family is small. You may carry on with normal activities but we do recommend you practice the following:

- Everyone who might help you with your personal hygiene or with going to the toilet should perform hand hygiene after contact with you.
- Wash your hands before you make any food and before you eat. Everyone in the household should follow this practice.
- If you share a bathroom at home, clean the toilet and sink daily with a germicidal cleanser. Wash your hands well after a bowel movement, or after cleaning the toilet. Make sure others that use the washroom wash their hands as well.
- No special handling of trash/garbage is required.
- Always tell your physician, paramedics, nurses or other care providers that you have VRE. This helps prevent transmission to other patients.

Good hand hygiene is the most important infection control practice. When washing hands:

- Use warm running water and soap.
- Lather and rub hands together, paying attention to fingertips, cuticles, around rings and under nails.
- Spend at least 15 seconds lathering and washing hands.
- Rinse hands thoroughly and pat dry.
- Turn off the taps with paper towel.
- Apply lotion several times throughout the day to help prevent dry, cracked skin (which can be an opening for infection).

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