



# Communicable Disease

## VANCOMYCIN RESISTANT ENTEROCOCCUS (VRE)

### *General Information*

#### **What is VRE?**

Vancomycin Resistant Enterococcus (VRE) is a bacterium that many antibiotics, including vancomycin cannot fight. Enterococci bacteria are commonly found in the bowel of healthy people; and may also be found in the urinary tract of women. This bacterium rarely causes serious illness in healthy people. People may carry VRE and have no symptoms.

#### **How is VRE spread?**

VRE is spread from one person to another by direct or indirect contact, but is not spread through the air like the cold or flu virus. Enterococci grow well on the hands and can survive for weeks or months on surfaces such as toilet seats, door handles, and furniture. The bacterium can be passed to others by touching contaminated surfaces and not washing hands.

#### **Who is most at risk for VRE infection?**

Healthy people are not likely to become ill with VRE. When healthy people test positive with the bacteria, they rarely become ill. People at high risk are usually found in hospitals and have underlying medical conditions that make them more susceptible to infection.

These conditions include:

- Critically ill patients in intensive care units
- Patients with severe underlying diseases (such as cancer) or weak immune systems (such as AIDS)
- Patients who have had major surgery
- Patients with urinary catheters
- Patients who have an IV catheter or central venous catheter
- Patients who have received many antibiotics, mainly vancomycin
- Patients who have been hospitalized in a facility or unit with other cases of VRE

#### **What treatment is available for VRE?**

VRE does not cause illness in healthy individuals. Most people with VRE eliminate the bacteria on their own. If treatment is necessary, combinations of antibiotics are used. Your physician will determine a treatment plan.

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## How is VRE prevented?

It is very important to prevent the spread of VRE from one person to another. It is important to follow these safety measures.

- ◆ **WASH YOUR HANDS** - Use soap (pump dispenser if possible) and warm water for 30 seconds
- ◆ **ENVIRONMENTAL CLEANING** – This bacteria can live for a long time on surfaces, therefore extra cleaning of personal articles and equipment is very important. Since the bacteria are found in the stool toilets need special attention, and if possible, should not be shared with other people. Regular cleaning with disinfectants or bleach (1 part bleach to 9 parts water) is very important. Dishes should be washed with hot, soapy water and set on a dish rack to drip dry.
- ◆ **PERSONAL HYGIENE** – People with VRE must use proper toilet hygiene. Wash hands thoroughly with soap and warm water immediately after using the toilet.
- ◆ **EQUIPMENT** – Thermometers, blood pressure cuffs and articles for personal use should be left in the home and should not be shared with other people. Any equipment that must be shared should be disinfected.
- ◆ **LAUNDRY AND WASTE DISPOSAL** – The bacteria is destroyed during the normal laundering process (soap and warm water). Garbage should be put out for regular pick-up.

**Tell healthcare providers if you have VRE so the appropriate safety measures can be followed.**

Sources: *Canada Communicable Disease Report (Infection Control Guidelines July 1999)/ The Management of Antibiotic Resistant Organisms (AROs) in Home Health: Infection Prevention & Control Guidelines – Feb 2000*

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