



University of Michigan
Health System

FAQs

(frequently asked questions)

about

“Vancomycin-Resistant Enterococcus”

What is VRE?

VRE refers to vancomycin-resistant *enterococcus*. The *enterococcus* is a germ or bacterium that lives in the intestinal tract and in the female genital tract. Most of the time, the *enterococcus* does not cause a problem. This is called colonization. Occasionally, the *enterococcus* can cause an infection of the urinary tract, bloodstream, or skin wounds. Vancomycin is an antibiotic that can be used to treat those infections. However, some *enterococcus* germs are no longer killed by vancomycin and are known as vancomycin-resistant *enterococcus* or VRE. These germs are often resistant to many antibiotics in addition to vancomycin.

Are certain people at risk of getting a VRE infection?

The following people are at an increased risk of becoming infected with VRE:

- People who have been previously treated with the antibiotic vancomycin or other antibiotics for long periods of time.
- People who are hospitalized, especially when they receive antibiotics for long periods of time.
- People with weakened immune systems such as patients in intensive care units, or in cancer or transplant wards.
- People who have undergone surgical procedures, such as abdominal or chest surgery.
- People with medical devices such as urinary catheters or intravenous (IV) catheters that stay in for some time.
- People who are colonized with VRE.

Can VRE infections be treated?

Most VRE infections can be treated with antibiotics other than vancomycin. Laboratory testing can help healthcare providers determine which antibiotics will work.

How is VRE spread?

VRE can be passed from person to person. VRE can get onto hands when they touch a person with VRE or after contact with contaminated surfaces or equipment.

How can the spread of VRE be prevented in the hospital?

In the hospital:

- Caregivers should clean their hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub before and after caring for every patient.
- Hospital rooms and medical equipment should be cleaned and disinfected after use.
- In some cases, your healthcare provider may also use gowns and gloves to help prevent spread
- Your healthcare providers should take special measures (isolation precautions) to prevent the spread of your infection to others.

How can I prevent the spread of VRE?

If you or someone in your household has VRE, the following can be done to prevent the spread of VRE:

- Keep your hands clean, especially after using the bathroom or before preparing food. Use soap and water or use alcohol-based hand rubs.
- Frequently clean areas of your home, such as your bathroom, that may become contaminated with VRE.
- Wear gloves if you might come in contact with body fluids (such as stool or bandages from infected wounds) that could contain VRE. Always wash your hands after removing gloves.
- If you have VRE, be sure to tell the healthcare provider caring for you. Healthcare facilities use special precautions to help prevent the spread of VRE to others.

Where can I get more information about VRE?

More information about VRE is available from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) at:
http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhqp/ar_vre.html

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