

VRE

Vancomycin Resistant Enterococci



What is VRE?

Enterococci are bacteria that are normally present in human intestines, the female genital tract, and are often found in the environment. These bacteria can sometimes cause infections. Vancomycin is an antibiotic that is often used to treat infections caused by enterococci. In some cases, enterococci have become resistant to vancomycin and are called vancomycin-resistant enterococci or VRE. Most VRE infections occur in people in hospitals.

Who gets VRE?

The following persons are at an increased risk 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, particularly when they receive antibiotic treatment 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 that stay in for some time such as urinary catheters or central intravenous (IV) catheters.
- People who are colonized with VRE. People who are colonized have the bacteria in their intestines without having any disease.

What is the treatment for VRE?

People who are colonized (bacteria are present, but have no symptoms of an infection) with VRE do not usually need treatment. Most VRE infections can be treated with antibiotics other than vancomycin. Laboratory testing of the VRE can determine which antibiotics will work. For people who get VRE infections in their bladder and have urinary catheters, removal of the catheter when it is no longer needed can also help get rid of the infection.

How is VRE spread?

VRE are spread by direct contact. VRE is often passed from person to person by the hands of caregivers. VRE can get onto a caregiver's hands after they have contact with other people with VRE or after contact with contaminated surfaces. VRE can also be spread directly to people after they touch surfaces that are contaminated with VRE. VRE is not usually spread through the air by coughing or sneezing.

What can be done to prevent the spread of VRE?

Staff education is the primary prevention tool used to combat the spread of VRE in a healthcare facility. Education should be provided regularly and incorporated into the infection control program.

If you have VRE:

- Keep your hands clean. Always wash your hands thoroughly after using the bathroom and before preparing food. Wash with soap and water (particularly when visibly soiled) 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 may come in contact with body fluids that may contain VRE, such as stool or bandages from infected wounds. Always wash your hands after removing gloves.
- If you have VRE, be sure to tell your healthcare providers so that they are aware of your infection. Healthcare facilities use special precautions to help prevent the spread of VRE to others.

For more information:

Spokane Regional Health District
Disease Prevention and Response Division
(509) 324-1442 | TDD (509) 324-1464