



INFECTION PREVENTION AND CONTROL

Vancomycin Resistant Enterococcus (VRE) Patient Information

What is VRE?

Enterococci are germs that live in the bowel of most individuals and generally do not cause harm. Vancomycin-resistant enterococci (VRE) are strains of enterococci that are resistant to the antibiotic vancomycin.

How do people get VRE?

VRE is spread from one person to another by contact, usually on the hands of caregivers. VRE can be present on the caregiver's hands either from touching a surface that is contaminated with VRE, or from caring for a person who has VRE. VRE can survive for weeks on surfaces such as toilet seats, taps, door handles, bedrails, furniture and bedpans if they have not been cleaned. VRE is easy to kill with good hand washing and the proper use of cleaners.

How does VRE make people sick?

In your bowel, VRE is the same as other good bacteria, but may cause an infection if it enters other parts of the body through the bladder or an intravenous catheter site (IV), or through cuts in the skin.

What are the symptoms of an infection with VRE?

A fever may be present. If VRE is found in your bladder the symptoms would be the same as any bladder infection (difficulty or pain while peeing), if it is in a wound there may be warmth, redness, and swelling.

Can infections with VRE be treated?

Most people that acquire VRE are only colonized (not infected) which means VRE is living in your bowel but not making you sick. If a person is sick with an infection caused by VRE, it can be more difficult to treat.

There are very specific antibiotics available that may be prescribed if you have an infection with VRE. If you are colonized you will not need to be treated for an infection. Treating people who are simply colonized with VRE is not effective and is not recommended.

What does the Hospital do to prevent the spread of VRE?

Hand washing is the most important way for everyone to prevent the spread of this germ and other germs. If tests show that you have VRE, you may be moved to a private room, and your healthcare provider will care for you wearing gloves and a gown. During the time you have VRE, you will be asked to stay in your room; however, you may still have visitors. It is very important that visitors clean their hands upon entering and exiting your room. Visitors who touch you will need to wear a gown and gloves. Please remind visitors not to use your bathroom. Over time, some people may get rid of these germs from their bowel. People who were identified as being positive will be tested on each admission to see if the germs are still living in the bowel.

What do you need to do for VRE at home?

Generally speaking, people in the hospital are sicker and get more infections than people in the community. At home, precautions do not need to be as strict. However, certain steps can help reduce the risk of spreading this germ to others.

Wash your hands for at least 15 seconds after using the toilet, before eating or before preparing food. Caregivers should wash their hands after providing care.

No special precautions are required to clean your home. This germ can be destroyed by most household cleaners (or a mix of 1 part bleach in 10 parts of water). Clean the dirtiest areas last, and let the surfaces air dry to allow enough contact time for the cleaner to work properly.

You may visit other people and carry on your normal life activities. The most important thing is keeping your hands very clean. If you are planning to visit someone in the hospital, you should talk to their Nurse to make sure you are not placing that person at risk.

What do I need to know prior to discharge?

People carrying VRE need to let healthcare providers (eg. Nurses, Doctors and Paramedics) know so that the appropriate steps can be taken to decrease the risk of spreading the bacteria.

For questions about this information, contact the Queensway Carleton Hospital's Infection Prevention and Control at 613-721-2000, ext 3777.