

# 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 health-care 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](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhqp/ar_vre.html)

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