

VANCOMYCIN-RESISTANT ENTEROCOCCI (VRE)

Information Sheet for Patients

WHAT IS VRE?

Enterococci are a type of bacteria which are naturally found in the intestines and female genital tract. Vancomycin-resistant enterococci (VRE) are a strain of enterococci that have become resistant to Vancomycin over time. Vancomycin is a powerful antibiotic that is used to treat many infections.

VRE can cause many types of infections, such as urinary tract infection and blood infection. Patients with VRE may not always show signs of infection, but can still transmit VRE to others. A person can carry VRE without any sign of infection for months or even years, and the bacteria can go away without treatment. VRE is not a barrier to a patient's discharge.

HOW IS VRE SPREAD?

VRE is spread from person to person by physical contact. This includes:

- Touching someone who has VRE
- Coming in contact with bodily fluids from a person who has VRE
- Touching contaminated surfaces around a person who has VRE

WHAT PRECAUTIONS ARE REQUIRED FOR VRE POSITIVE PATIENT IN HOSPITAL?

It is important that special precautions are taken to stop VRE from spreading to other patients in the hospital. If you are a VRE-positive patient, these precautions will be implemented:

- A new accommodation (if previously accommodated in a multi bed room)
- Dedicated commode at the bedside if you are ambulatory and accommodated in the room that shares washroom with another patient who is not VRE positive
- A sign will be placed on your door to remind others who enter your room about the special precautions (such as instructions to clean hands, wear gown and gloves)
- A long-sleeved gown and gloves will be worn by everyone who cares for you, or have contact with you and your environment (including your visitors)
- The room/washroom and the equipment used in the room will be cleaned and disinfected regularly
- Everyone who leaves your room must clean their hands well
- You can do the therapy outside your room, but before leaving the room you must clean your hands with soap and water or with alcohol-based hand rub and wear clean clothes

If you have questions or concerns during hospital stay, ask your nurse to call Infection Prevention and Control or email us at Infection.Control@runnymede.hc.ca.

IS MY FAMILY AT RISK WHEN I GO HOME?

- Healthy people at home are rarely at risk for developing a VRE infection as long as they wash their hands often.
- It is important that you tell your doctor or nurse if you live with someone who has a long-term illness or is getting medical treatments such as kidney dialysis or intravenous (IV) medication.

WHAT DO I NEED TO DO AT HOME?

If you are a VRE- positive patient:

- Clean your hands often with soap and water or with hand sanitizer, especially after using the washroom and before making food.
- Everyone who might help you with your personal hygiene or with going to the toilet should wash their hands after contact with you.
- If you share a bathroom at home, clean the toilet and sink at least weekly with a household cleanser.
- Clothes can be laundered in your usual way along with other household clothes.
- No special cleaning of furniture or items (e.g., dishes) in the home is required.
- Any contact with a wound or device such as a colostomy bag, Foley catheter or feeding tube should be made with clean hands and gloves; ensure gloves are removed and disposed of immediately after contact, and hands are washed.
- Don't share personal care items with others, including bar soap, towels, nail trimmers, tweezers, razors and toothbrushes.
- Always tell your physician, paramedics, nurses or other care providers that you have VRE. This helps prevent the spread of VRE to others, and will help your doctor choose the right antibiotics if necessary.

WHO DO I CONTACT IF I HAVE ANY FURTHER CONCERNS ABOUT VRE?

- After discharge contact your family physician if you have any questions.

WHY ARE PRECAUTIONS DIFFERENT IN HOSPITAL AND IN THE COMMUNITY?

- Additional precautions are used in the hospital for patients found to have VRE. These precautions are usually not required at home or in the community. The difference is related to the environment and the people who may be at risk.
- Hospitals have many sick and vulnerable patients as well as healthcare workers who have frequent contact with many patients. Therefore, additional precautions such as the use of gloves, gowns, dedicated equipment, enhanced cleaning and disinfection and patient isolation are used to prevent the spread of bacteria between patients.
- The above precautions are usually not required at home, because the risk is generally much lower. Most healthy people can live normally with someone carrying VRE without contracting the bacteria from them. Good hand hygiene, covering wounds or areas of broken skin, regular cleaning and not sharing personal items are usually sufficient.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE PATIENT AND FAMILY?

- It is important to remember that testing positive for VRE does not mean the patient has an infection. Overall, the risk of developing a serious infection from VRE is very low.
- Having VRE does not usually mean the person needs to be isolated at home.
- Family members can usually visit and spend time with the patient, hug, talk and participate in everyday activities and share common household spaces.