

Greenwich Hospital

What is VRE—Vancomycin-Resistant Enterococci

PATIENT/FAMILY INFORMATION SHEET

What is VRE?

VRE is Vancomycin-Resistant Enterococci. **Enterococci** are bacteria that are commonly found in the stomach and bowels of 95% of the population. They can also be found in the mouth, throat, and vagina. These bacteria rarely cause illness in healthy people. However, when VRE gets into open wounds and skin sores, they can cause infections in the wounds. Occasionally, VRE can also cause more serious infections of the blood or other body tissues.

Vancomycin is an antibiotic used to treat serious infections. This drug is also used to treat enterococci because these bacteria are resistant to many other drugs. **Resistant** means that a drug is not effective in treating the bacteria or infection. Sometimes bacteria, such as enterococci, become resistant to Vancomycin and the drug no longer works. When this happens, it becomes more difficult to treat the enterococcal infection.

Who gets VRE?

People at risk for developing VRE are those who have had experience with:

- A long-term illness
- The need for taking many different types of antibiotics
- Major surgery
- An organ or bone marrow transplant.
- Problems with their immune system.

How is VRE spread?

VRE is most commonly spread by direct hand contact with an infected person. VRE is also spread by touching surfaces, such as railings, faucets, or door handles that have been contaminated by someone infected with the bacteria. **Hand washing** is critical to prevent the spread of VRE.

How is VRE treated?

Healthy people who carry VRE in their bodies do not need treatment. Those with serious VRE infections will be treated with other antibiotics.

What happens in the hospital?

Because VRE is spread by physical contact, special precautions must be taken to prevent the spread of these bacteria to other patients. Patients with VRE infections are placed in single rooms. **All health care workers who enter the room must wear a gown and gloves to prevent the spread of VRE to other patients.** Before leaving the room, they wash their hands or use the alcohol gel provided. In addition, the patient's activities are restricted to his/her room except to leave for medical purposes such as procedures or emergencies.

Is it safe to visit a person with VRE?

Because healthy people are at very little risk of getting infected with VRE, it is safe to visit when in good health. It is recommended that visitors refrain from visiting if they are not feeling well or are caring for sick individuals at home. It is also recommended that infants and young children refrain from visiting. Persons who are sick or have a weak immune system should not visit.

Visitors do not have to wear gowns and gloves, but it is important that visitors wash their hands thoroughly before and after contact with the patient and the patient's environment, and before leaving the room. Visitors should also refrain from visiting other patients in the hospital after leaving the room of a patient infected with VRE.

How is VRE prevented?

Hand washing is the most important thing to do to prevent the spread of VRE. The key times to wash hands are:

- When soiled
- Before and after eating, drinking, smoking, or applying personal care products
- Before and after using the toilet
- After contact with someone infected with VRE or with the infected person's environment.
- It is also important to do cleaning with regular household cleaners because these bacteria are found in bathroom facilities.

How can I get more information?

If you have questions about VRE or about how you can prevent the spread of VRE, speak to our Infection Control Practitioner or our nursing staff. Information is also available at:

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention @ www.cdc.gov
- Association of Medical Microbiologists @ www.amm.co.uk
- Johns Hopkins Epidemiology & Infection Control @ www.hopkins-heic.org

Sources: Association of Medical Microbiologists. Retrieved 1/05 from www.amm.co.uk
Johns Hopkins Epidemiology & Infection Control. Retrieved 1/05 from www.hopkins-heic.org

For more Patient Fact Sheets, see the Greenwich Hospital web site at www.greenhosp.org and click on Patients & Visitors, then Patient Education. 1/05