



Infection Prevention and Control FACT SHEET **VANCOMYCIN RESISTANT ENTEROCOCCUS (VRE)** **Information for Patients and Caregivers**

What is VRE?

Enterococci are bacteria that live in the gastrointestinal tract (bowels) of most individuals and generally do not cause harm (this is called “colonization”). **VRE** is the short form used for **vancomycin-resistant enterococci** which are strains of these bacteria that have developed the ability to resist or not respond to treatment with a commonly used antibiotic like Vancomycin. If a person has an infection caused by VRE, such as a urinary tract infection or blood infection, it may be more difficult to treat.

How is VRE Spread?

VRE is spread from one person to another by contact, usually on the hands of caregivers. VRE can live on hands and objects in the environment. VRE can be present on the caregiver’s hands either from touching the skin or contaminated body fluids or secretions from the infected person, or from touching contaminated articles or equipment used by a person with VRE. These bacteria can survive for weeks on inanimate objects such as toilet seats, taps, door handles, bedrails, furniture and bedpans.

What Additional Precautions are needed for VRE?

It is important that additional precautions are taken to stop VRE from spreading to other patients in the hospital. These precautions include:

- Private room (the door can remain open)
- A long-sleeved gown and gloves must be worn by everyone who enters your room; this is called personal protective equipment (PPE).
- A sign will be placed at the doorway advising staff and visitors about the additional precautions.
- The room and the equipment used in the room will be cleaned and disinfected regularly.
- Everyone who leaves your room must remove their PPE, gloves first, and then gown, before leaving the room and discard into the covered garbage hamper located just inside the doorway.
- After PPE removal, hands must be cleaned with alcohol based hand rub, before leaving the patient’s room.
- Visitors must not eat or drink while visiting in the patient’s room.

Risk Factors for VRE:

People at risk for colonization or infection with VRE are usually hospitalized and have an underlying medical condition which makes them susceptible to infection. These conditions include patients with:

- previous hospitalization or transfer between health care facilities (in Canada or outside Canada)
- critical illness requiring a stay in an intensive care unit (ICU)
- severe underlying disease or weakened immune systems
- urinary catheters
- exposure to (or contact with) another patient with VRE
- antibiotic use, particularly vancomycin

How is VRE Treated?

For most patients VRE does not require medication, if there is no infection. Often patients who are positive for VRE are just carrying the bacteria on their skin or in their bowels, and that is called being colonized. VRE colonized patients are not prescribed treatment when there are no symptoms or signs of infection.

What about Family/Visitors?

Visitors are welcome but should ask for instructions from the nurse when visiting for the first time. It is important for visitors to closely follow PPE and hand hygiene instruction so that the bacteria does not spread to other patients. Visitors should not bring coats and personal items like purses or bags into the isolation room.

Hooks are located outside some of the patient rooms or ask for a plastic bag from the nurse if the item must be brought into the room for security reasons. Ask for a copy of the **'Helpful Tips for Visitors to Isolation Rooms'** information sheet.

Good Hand Hygiene Practices:

Staff and visitors must practice good hand hygiene before and after they touch you or items in your room like the bed, medical equipment or wheelchair. Ask your nurse to show you the correct way to clean hands for yourself and visitors (15 seconds of soap and running water OR alcohol based hand sanitizer rubbed until hands are dry).

Hands must be cleaned:

- After using the bathroom/commode/urinal
- After blowing your nose
- Before eating and drinking
- Before and after you touch your dressing or wounds
- When your hands are visibly dirty (soiled)
- Upon exit or entering your room

What Will Happen at Home?

For hospitalized patients who are weakened by illness, and may have surgical incisions or catheters, VRE can mean a higher risk for infection and that is why precautions are very important while in the hospital. Once a patient with VRE goes home, the chance of spreading the bacteria to household members is small, but we do recommend that you practice the following:

- Everyone who might help you with your personal hygiene or with going to the toilet should wash their hands after contact with you.
- Wash your hands before you make any food and before you eat. This practice should be followed by everyone in the household.
- Wash hands well after using the toilet and don't share towels with others.
- Clothing may be laundered in the same manner as the rest of the household laundry.
- No special cleaning of furniture or items (e.g. dishes) in the home is required.
- Always tell your physician, paramedics, nurses or other care providers that you have VRE. This helps prevent spread to others.
- Upon return to the hospital always notify the healthcare worker that you have a history of VRE.

Computer Alerts for VRE

- A record of the VRE positive swabs will remain on the hospitals computer record so that if you return to our hospital, additional precautions in a private room will be taken until VRE screening swab results are known. The computer alert is never removed, as patients can carry these bacteria for a lifetime, and always have the potential to be positive again even after several negative swabs.
- Sometimes the precautions can be stopped during an admission if there is a record of three negative VRE swabs, including negative swabs collected on the current admission. Removal of the additional precautions will only apply to that hospital stay; swabs must be collected on each admission before precautions can be stopped.

References:

1. Public Health Ontario (PHO). Provincial Infectious Diseases Advisory Committee (PIDAC). Annex A: Screening, Testing and Surveillance for Antibiotic-Resistant Organisms (AROs) February 2013.
<https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/aros-screening-testing-surveillance.pdf?la=en>
2. Public Health Ontario (PHO). Provincial Infectious Diseases Advisory Committee (PIDAC) - Routine Practices and Additional Precautions in All Health Care Settings. Third Edition November 2012.
http://www.publichealthontario.ca/en/eRepository/RPAP_All_HealthCare_Settings_Eng2012.pdf

Questions:

**Call the Infection Prevention and Control Department
at 705-324-6111 ext. 4508 or 4527.**