



Information for Patients and Families



UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO
HOSPITAL
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Vancomycin Resistant Enterococcus (VRE) in the Patient at Home

What is VRE?

You have been told that you have *vancomycin-resistant enterococcus* or VRE. Vancomycin is an antibiotic used to treat infections. Sometimes the enterococcus germ (organism) becomes resistant to vancomycin (no longer affected by it). Then it is called VRE.

You need to follow the suggestions listed below until your health care provider tells you that you no longer have VRE. This is to avoid spreading the VRE to your family members. A study done by the New York Department of Health showed that of 300 family members tested, **none** of them acquired VRE from the family member who was positive.

Who gets VRE?

- Persons whose defenses against infection have been lowered or damaged.
- Those persons whose immune systems have been weakened by chronic or severe illness or disability.
- Those who have been treated with many antibiotics or who have received certain antibiotics over a long time. This results in changes in the organisms in and on that person.
- Persons who have had surgery.
- Those who have been hospitalized for extended periods, or have had a long stay in an intensive care or burn unit.
- Persons who have been hospitalized many times in the last several years.

VRE is not a threat to a healthy person. Healthy people may carry the germ, but VRE usually causes infection only in those with weakened defenses.

Where is it found?

- Enterococcus is usually found in the gastrointestinal or female genital tract. VRE is normally found in the stool. It also can be found in wounds, bedsores, urine or wherever it can be carried by the blood. VRE can also be found on surfaces in the environment around the person who has VRE (such as table tops).
- Persons may be “colonized” with VRE. That means that the organism is present in or on the person. (They have a positive culture showing they carry the germ.) When someone is “colonized” they do not show any signs or symptoms of infection. This is sometimes called a “carrier” state.
- Persons may be “infected” when they have a positive culture AND show the signs and symptoms of infection: fever, chills, redness, local heat, pain, etc.

(OVER)

How is it spread to others?

The germ (organism) can be spread by direct contact or indirect contact:

- Direct contact involves direct body surface to body surface (for example, giving a bath, changing a dressing).
- Indirect contact transmission occurs when an immune compromised person comes in contact with an object contaminated with VRE. The spread of VRE occurs most often by contaminated hands touching the environment or another person. VRE can live on surfaces for up to 7 days and on hands for hours. But, VRE can be killed easily with the use of disinfectant and good handwashing.

General Guidelines

- When you go to medical appointments, be sure to tell your health care provider that you have VRE. They need to be sure to take steps to avoid spreading it to others.
- It is fine to leave your house to go shopping, or to do your normal errands and routines. Be sure to **wash** your hands before leaving home.
- Wash your hands, **especially** after using the toilet and before eating.
- Be sure to obtain rectal swabs or urine cultures as ordered by your doctor.

Hand Care for Your Care Providers

- Your care providers should wash their hands for at least 10 seconds after coming in close contact with you, or items you have touched. They should also wash their hands before making any food or eating.
- They should use an antibacterial soap to wash their hands.
- They should wear gloves (not cloth) if they must handle your stool or urine. They should wash their hands after taking off their gloves.

Eating

- Do NOT share your dishes and utensils with others. Do NOT allow others to take bites of your food.
- Wash your hands before eating.
- If you prepare food, wash your hands thoroughly before doing so.
- Wash your dishes in a dish washer. If you do not have a dishwasher, be sure to wash the dishes with dish soap and hot water.

Cleaning the Bathroom

- If possible, you should have your own bathroom. If not, the toilet and sink should be cleaned at least daily. Be especially careful to clean after bowel movements.
- VRE is easy to kill on surfaces such as toilet seats, etc., as long as it is in contact with a disinfectant cleaner for enough time. If you wet a surface well with the cleaner and then let it air-dry, that should be enough contact time to kill the germ.
- You can use a solution of bleach and water to clean. Mix 1 part bleach to 10 parts water. A new batch of solution should be made each day. Or, if you would rather, you can use any commercial disinfectant such as Lisol™. (Be sure the label says it kills bacteria.)

Disposing of Wastes

Put all disposable wastes like dressings and bandages into plastic bags. Tie the bags securely. They can then be thrown out with the regular garbage.

Laundry

- If you have clothes that have been heavily soiled with body fluids, wash them by themselves in detergent and bleach.
- Clothes NOT soiled with body fluids can be washed with the family's clothing.
- Launder your clothing daily, and more often if your clothes become soiled with body fluids.

If you have any questions or concerns, call 720-848-0000 and ask for Infection Control.