



Craig Hospital

Redefining Possible for People with Spinal Cord and Brain Injuries

Provided as a courtesy of
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Vancomycin Resistant Enterococcus: VRE

What is VRE?

VRE stands for vancomycin-resistant enterococcus. Vancomycin is an antibiotic used to treat infections. Enterococcus is a germ normally found in the lower intestinal tract and the female vagina. Sometimes this germ becomes strong enough to resist vancomycin. This is called VRE, for short.

Who gets VRE?

Those at greatest risk for VRE infections are:

- People in the hospital with severe conditions (ex, cancer or severe injuries)
- People who stay in the hospital for a long period of time
- People who have many medical procedures (IVs, catheters, surgeries)
- The elderly, especially those in long-term care facilities
- People with frequent exposure to vancomycin and other antibiotics
- People may be "colonized" with the germ, which means that they have the germ but it is not causing an infection. Other people may be "infected" which means they have the germ which causes an infection making them sick.

Where is it?

VRE is most often found in feces or stool but it can also be present in urine, blood, skin wounds, or other body fluids. It can also be found on the skin, especially in the warm and moist areas of the groin and under the arms.

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How is it treated?

If a VRE infection results in sickness, it can sometimes be treated with other antibiotics.

If VRE has colonized a part of the body but doesn't cause sickness, treatment is usually not necessary. Some people's immune systems will be able to fight VRE on their own. The body's natural defenses can sometimes get rid of VRE within several months. If the infection ever causes sickness – you must contact your healthcare provider for treatment.

How does VRE occur? Can it spread?

VRE is sometimes brought into the hospital from a VRE colonized person. Since they are not sick, they don't know they are spreading the infection!

In the hospital setting, VRE can be spread between patients, most likely by hands and/or touching contaminated equipment.

Also, since enterococci are normally found in the bowels and vagina, a person may develop VRE after taking an antibiotic for an unrelated infection.

VRE is a hardy germ!

**VRE can survive on hard surfaces for days and on hands for hours.
It is easy to eliminate, however, with
proper use of disinfectant and good hand washing.**

How can I prevent it?

This germ does not travel through the air. MASKS ARE NOT NEEDED.

Washing hands is the best protection! Everyone must sanitize or wash their hands thoroughly before entering or leaving any patient room regardless of VRE presence. Ask your healthcare providers to wash their hands before they perform your care – don't worry about offending them – they know it is the right thing to do.

Gloves must be worn by everyone who has contact with the patient, the patient's room, and bed environment (which could be soiled with body secretions). Throw them away prior to leaving the room.

Gowns must be worn by everyone whose body or clothes will have contact with the patient or their environment, including the bed and bed linens. This means family and visitors as well. Throw them away before leaving the room. Visitors who do not make body contact and will not be mixing with other patients simply need to wash their hands thoroughly before leaving the room.

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