

Vancomycin-Resistant Enterococcus (VRE)

An organism requiring contact precautions

This handout describes VRE and explains who is at risk for getting it, how the disease can be spread, and steps to prevent others from getting it. To learn more, visit www.cdc.gov/HAI/organisms/vre/vre.html.

What is a vancomycin-resistant enterococcus?

Enterococci are bacteria found in the bowel. They usually do not cause any problems, but they can cause serious infections in the blood, the surgical wound, and the urinary tract.

The antibiotic *vancomycin* is usually used to treat these infections. But, sometimes vancomycin may not be the best antibiotic for an enterococcus infection. This type of enterococcus is called a *vancomycin-resistant enterococcus* (VRE).

How does someone get VRE?

VRE can develop inside your body if you have taken antibiotics for a long time. Someone can also get VRE by:

- Having contact with someone who carries VRE. The person may have symptoms (*infected*) or may not (*colonized*).
- Touching hygiene items (such as towels, soap, dressings, and bandages), sheets, clothing, and other things the person with VRE has used.

A health care worker's hands may also spread VRE, if we do not know a patient has VRE. To protect others, **please tell your health care provider if you know that you are colonized or infected with VRE.**

Who is at risk for a VRE infection?

You may be at risk of developing a VRE infection if you:

- Have a severe illness or other conditions such as chronic renal disease, insulin-dependent diabetes, peripheral vascular disease, dermatitis, or skin lesions.
- Are a senior citizen.
- Have used antibiotics.
- Have had other drug-resistant infections.
- Have had an invasive procedure, such as dialysis, invasive devices, or a urinary catheter.
- Have been in the hospital many times.



To protect others from VRE, wash your hands often, or use an alcohol hand gel.

How is VRE diagnosed?

A specimen is sent to the lab for testing. If you have VRE, these tests will also tell your doctor what antibiotics can be used to treat the infection.

How are others protected from VRE?

To protect others from VRE, follow these safety precautions:

- Wash your hands with soap and water or use an alcohol hand gel often, especially after using the bathroom and before eating.
- Caregivers should wear gloves. They should wash their hands after changing bandages or touching the infected site. Towels used for drying hands after contact should be used only once and then washed.
- Change and wash sheets and towels often with hot water. Dry clothes and linens in a hot dryer to kill bacteria.
- Clean bathroom surfaces, kitchens, and other areas often. For a cleaning solution, mix 1 tablespoon household bleach in 1 quart of water. This solution must be made fresh each day. Or, use a store-bought product with phenol such as Lysol or Pine-Sol to kill VRE.

What happens when I am in contact precautions?

At University of Washington Medical Center, we place a “Contact Precautions” sign near the door of your room to alert health care workers and your visitors to observe extra precautions when caring for you.

To help protect other patients from getting VRE:

- Health care workers will wear gowns and gloves when providing your care. **We emphasize handwashing for 15 seconds, using alcohol hand gels, and keeping a clean environment.**
- You will be asked to stay in your room unless you need to go to other areas in the hospital for treatment. If you leave your room, you will be asked to wash your hands and to wear a yellow gown and gloves.
- Please do not use the nutrition rooms while you are “in isolation.” When you want a snack or water, ask your care provider to bring it to you.

What else do I need to know?

Patients who are admitted to 7-Northeast, 8-Northeast, and 8SA are routinely tested for VRE. A patient who has had VRE or a positive test for VRE will be placed on contact precautions each time they are admitted to one of these units.

For other patients, contact precautions can usually be stopped when:

- You are no longer taking antibiotics, AND
- 2 follow-up specimens taken on 2 separate days show that you no longer have VRE. These specimens may be taken from the infection site or from stool samples.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns.

Infection Control and
Epidemiology: 206-598-6122