Vancomycin Resistant Enterococcus (VRE)

This information explains vancomycin resistant Enterococcus (VRE), including how it spreads and how infections are treated.

What is vancomycin resistant Enterococcus?

Enterococci are bacteria that are naturally present in your intestinal tract. Some strains of enterococci have become resistant to the antibiotic vancomycin. This means that certain treatments won’t work or may be less effective. These resistant strains are referred to as vancomycin resistant Enterococcus (VRE).

VRE can cause a variety of illnesses, including:

- Urinary tract infections (UTIs)
- Blood infections
- Wound infections

How is VRE spread?

VRE is spread by direct contact with an infected person’s bodily fluids, such as blood, drainage from a wound, urine (pee), bowel movements (stool), or sputum (phlegm). It can also be spread by touching equipment or surfaces that have come in contact with the bacteria. Casual contact, such as touching or hugging, doesn’t spread VRE.

Who is at risk for a VRE infection?

You’re more likely to get an VRE infection if you:
• Are older
• Have weakened immune systems
• Have chronic illnesses, such as cancer or diabetes
• Have been treated with antibiotics in the past
• Have had a recent surgery
• Have had repeated or long stays in the hospital
• Have open wounds or sores
• Have tubes or drains in the body

What are the symptoms of a VRE infection?
Your symptoms will depend on the location and type of infection you have.

How is a VRE infection treated?
VRE infections are treated with antibiotics that are not resistant to the bacteria.

What isolation precautions are taken in the hospital if I have a VRE infection?
Isolation precautions are steps we take to stop infections from spreading from person to person. If you’re diagnosed with or exposed to a VRE infection while you’re in the hospital:

• You will be placed in a private room.
• A sign will be posted on your door telling all staff and visitors to clean their hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer before going into and after leaving your room.
• All staff and visitors who enter your room must wear a yellow gown and gloves. These are available outside of your room and can be disposed of inside your room.
• If you leave your room for tests, you must wear a yellow gown and gloves or be
covered with a clean sheet.

- If you leave your room to walk around the unit, you must wear a yellow gown and gloves.
- You won’t be able to go to the following areas of the hospital:
  - Pantry on your unit
  - Recreation center on M15
  - Pediatric recreation areas on M9
  - Cafeteria
  - Main lobby
  - Any other public area of the hospital
- You can have art or massage therapy in your room while following isolation precautions.

Your doctor will let you know when you can stop following these precautions. This will be after you’re treated and no longer have symptoms.

**What precautions should I take at home if I have a VRE infection?**

Be sure to do the following at home:

- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after using the bathroom.
- Wash your hands after having contact with blood, urine, or drainage from a wound.
- Use a disinfectant, such as Clorox® or Lysol®, to wipe any surface that may have come in contact with the bacteria, such as your doorknob.

**Where can I get more information about VRE?**
If you have any questions, talk with your doctor or nurse. You can also visit the following websites for more information:

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**
www.cdc.gov/HAI/organisms/vre/vre.html

**New York State Department of Health**
www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/vancomycin_resistant_enterococcus/fact_sheet.htm

If you have any questions, contact a member of your healthcare team directly. If you're a patient at MSK and you need to reach a provider after 5:00 PM, during the weekend, or on a holiday, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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