VRE
(Vancomycin-resistant Enterococcus)
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What is VRE?
Enterococci (plural of enterococcus) are bacteria that are commonly found in our bowel (gut). They do not normally cause problems. Vancomycin-resistant enterococcus (VRE) is not a disease. However, enterococci can sometimes go to other parts of the body and cause infection.

Antibiotics such as vancomycin are medications used to treat some infections. The enterococcus bacteria sometimes develop the ability to not be destroyed by vancomycin or other antibiotics. When this happens, the bacteria are called “resistant” to vancomycin, and are known as vancomycin-resistant enterococcus or enterococci. We call this VRE.

How is VRE spread?
VRE can be found in the community and in health care settings. It can also be found on people and on surfaces. VRE is mainly spread by contact with (touching) unclean hands or surfaces.
Screening for VRE

It is important for health care providers to know if you carry VRE. This will remind them to take special precautions so that VRE will not spread to other patients.

Testing for VRE is simple. If you have certain risk factors when you are admitted to the hospital, a stool specimen (poop sample) or swab samples will be collected.

The swabs are taken with a swab stick similar to a Q-tip®. The swabs are sent to the lab for testing.

Your health care provider, or an Infection Prevention and Control practitioner from the hospital will tell you if your result is positive.

What are your questions?
Please ask. We are here to help you.
VRE care in hospital

If you are admitted to the hospital, it is important that additional precautions are taken to keep VRE from spreading to other patients. These ‘additional precautions’ include:

- Having your own room, when possible.
- A sign placed outside your hospital room to remind people who enter your room about the precautions.
- You should not go into kitchenettes, patient lounges, or other patient rooms, etc. Ask your health care provider for help.
- Gloves and a gown are worn by anyone who provides direct care for you, including family and visitors.
  - ‘Direct care’ includes giving hands-on care, such as bathing, washing, turning the patient, changing clothes or diapers, bandage changes, care of open wounds/lesions and toileting. Feeding or pushing a wheelchair are not considered direct care.
- Everyone who leaves your hospital room, including you, must perform hand hygiene (clean hands well with soap and water or alcohol based hand rub).
Care at home

If you have VRE at the time of discharge from hospital, the chance of spreading it to your family is very small.

- Use liquid hand soap to wash your hands instead of a bar of soap. Alcohol-based hand rub is another good way to clean your hands when a sink is not available.
- Clean your hands well after personal hygiene and after using the toilet.
- Encourage anyone who helps you with your personal hygiene or with using the toilet to wash their hands after contact with you.
- Clean your hands well before preparing or eating food. Everyone in the household should also do this.
- Clean your hands before leaving home.
- Carry alcohol-based hand rub or hand wipes to use when you are away from home.

Personal care

Do not share items such as towels, facecloths, toiletries and razors. Cover any open cuts or draining sores with a clean bandage.

Intimacy and sex

Having VRE doesn’t stop you from being intimate with your partner. Maintaining good hygiene is important for both partners. If you are concerned, talk with your health care provider.
Cleaning
Regular household disinfectants should be used for routine cleaning of your home. Look for the word ‘disinfectant’ when shopping for cleaning products for the kitchen and bathroom. Follow the directions on the label and use clean cloths for each area.

Laundry
Do not share used towels, face cloths or other items. Wash clothing that is heavily soiled with bodily fluids separately from other clothing. Wash and dry clothing using the warmest temperature allowed on the label. Wear clean clothing each day, if possible.

Personal waste
Place all soiled personal care waste such as bandages or incontinence products in plastic bags to put out for your local municipality waste management program.

Visitors
• You may have visitors.
• The best way to prevent spreading VRE is to practise good hand hygiene. Hugging, kissing and shaking hands are all fine.
• If you have any concerns or questions, talk about them with your health care provider.
How long will I have VRE?
VRE may go away on its own, or you may carry it for months or years. Even if your tests show that you no longer have VRE, you may continue to be on ‘additional precautions’ while you are in the hospital. A member of the Infection Prevention and Control team will review your test results to see if ‘additional precautions’ are still needed. Any treatments provided will be decided by your health care provider.

Communication
Please tell all of your health care providers that you have VRE. This will help them plan your care and choose the right treatment for you. It will also help prevent the bacteria from being passed to other patients.

Antibiotic use
Overuse and misuse of antibiotics can contribute to antibiotic resistance. Antibiotics should be taken as prescribed by your health care provider. Do not take partial doses or stop taking your medication before completing the entire prescription unless your health care provider tells you to.
Remember:
Washing your hands with liquid soap and water or alcohol-based hand rub is the best way to stop the spread of infection.

Looking for more health information?
Find this pamphlet and all our patient resources here: http://library.nshealth.ca/PatientGuides
Contact your local public library for books, videos, magazines, and other resources.
For more information go to http://library.novascotia.ca

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The information in this pamphlet is to be updated every 3 years or as needed.