



Patient & Family Guide

2024

VRE (Vancomycin- resistant Enterococcus)

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VRE

What is VRE?

- Enterococci (plural of enterococcus) are a type of bacteria. They are commonly found in the bowel (gut). If enterococci move to other parts of the body, they can cause an infection and make you sick.
- Medications called antibiotics are used to treat infections. Vancomycin is an antibiotic.
- Sometimes, enterococci cannot be destroyed by vancomycin or other antibiotics. When this happens, the bacteria are called resistant to vancomycin. They are known as vancomycin-resistant enterococcus or enterococci (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.
- The most common way VRE is spread is by touching hands or surfaces that are not clean.

The best way to avoid spreading VRE is to practice good hand hygiene (clean hands well with soap and water or alcohol-based hand rub).

Screening for VRE

- **It is important for your health care providers to know if you are carrying VRE.** They will take special precautions, so it will not spread to other patients.
- Testing for VRE is simple. If you have certain risk factors when you are admitted to the hospital, your health care team will ask to take a swab from your rectum (bum) or ask for a stool (poop) sample.
 - › The swab samples are taken with a stick that looks like a cotton swab.
 - › The samples will be sent to the lab for testing.
- Your doctor or nurse, or an Infection Prevention and Control practitioner from the hospital, will tell you if you have VRE.

Care in the hospital

- If you have VRE, your health care team will take special precautions to keep it from spreading to other patients, like:
 - › You will have your own room, when possible. There will be a sign outside your room to tell others who enter about the special precautions.
 - › You will be asked not to use shared spaces in the hospital, including kitchens, patient lounges, and other patient rooms.

Anyone who gives you direct care, including your loved ones and visitors, must wear a gown and gloves. Direct care means giving hands-on care, like:

- › Bathing and washing
- › Helping you move
- › Changing clothes, bandages, or diapers
- › Caring for open wounds or lesions
- › Taking you to the toilet

Everyone who leaves your hospital room, including you, must practice hand hygiene.

Care at home

- **If you have VRE when you are discharged from the hospital, the chance of spreading it to your loved ones is very small.**
- Use liquid hand soap instead of bar soap. Bacteria can live on bar soap. Using alcohol-based hand rub is another good way to clean your hands when a sink is not available. Clean your hands well after touching your genital area (like washing your genitals) and after using the toilet.
- Encourage anyone who helps you with your personal hygiene or with going to the toilet to wash their hands after contact with you.

- Clean your hands well before making or eating food. Everyone who lives with you should also do this.
- Clean your hands before leaving home. Carry alcohol-based hand rub or wipes with you to use when you are outside of your home.

Personal care

- **Do not** share items like towels, facecloths, toiletries, or razors.
- Cover any open cuts or draining sores with a clean bandage. Shower or bathe often.

Caring for others

- If you have VRE, you can still care for others, including children.

Intimacy and sex

- You can still be intimate with your partner if you have VRE. **It is important for both partners to have good personal hygiene.** If you have any questions, talk to your health care provider.

Cleaning your house

- Use household disinfectants to clean your house. Look for the word 'disinfectant' when shopping for cleaning products for the kitchen and bathroom. Always follow the directions on the label and use a clean cloth for each area.

Laundry

- **Do not** share used towels, facecloths, or other items. Wash clothes dirtied with bodily fluids separately from other clothes.
- Wash and dry clothes using the warmest temperature allowed on the label. Wear clean clothes each day, if you can.

Household waste

- Put all personal care waste (like bandages or diapers) in plastic bags to put out with your regular garbage.

Visitors

- You may have visitors. The best way to prevent spreading VRE is to practice good hand hygiene. Hugging, kissing, and shaking hands are OK.
- If you have any concerns or questions, talk to 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 a test shows that you no longer have VRE, you may still be on special precautions while you are in the hospital.

- A member of the Infection Prevention and Control team will review your test results to see if special precautions are still needed. Your health care team will decide what treatments you may need.

Communication

- **Please tell all your health care providers that you have VRE.** This will help them:
 - › plan your care.
 - › choose the right treatment for you.
 - › prevent the bacteria from being passed to other patients.
- If your health care providers do not know that you have VRE, they may prescribe an antibiotic that is not effective. This could delay your treatment and create germs that are more resistant to certain antibiotics.

Antibiotic use

- Overuse and misuse of antibiotics can cause antibiotic resistance. Antibiotics should only be taken if prescribed by your health care provider.

- **Do not** take partial doses (part of the prescribed amount) or stop taking any medications before finishing the whole prescription. Only change your dose or stop a medication if your health care provider tells you to.

Remember: Cleaning your hands with soap and water or with alcohol-based hand rub is the best way to stop the spread of infection.

This pamphlet is for educational purposes only. It is not intended to replace the advice or professional judgment of a health care provider. The information may not apply to all situations. If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

Find all patient education resources here:
www.nshealth.ca/patient-education-resources

Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time:
Call 811 or visit: <https://811.novascotia.ca>

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