

Vancomycin-Resistant Enterococci Fact Sheet

1. **What are Vancomycin-Resistant Enterococci (VRE)?** - Enterococci are bacteria normally found in the human intestine and in the female genital tract and in the environment. Vancomycin is an antibiotic that is often used to treat infections caused by enterococci bacteria. When enterococci become resistant to this drug, they are known as vancomycin-resistant enterococci (VRE). Most VRE infections occur in hospitals.
2. **What types of infections does VRE cause?** - VRE can live in the human intestines and female genital tract without causing disease (colonization). However, sometimes, it can be the cause of urinary tract infections, blood stream infections and wounds associated with catheters or surgical procedures.
3. **Are certain people at risk of getting VRE?** - The following persons are at an increased risk becoming infected with VRE:
 - a. Persons who have been previously treated with vancomycin and combinations of other antibiotics such as penicillin and gentamicin for long periods of time.
 - b. Persons who are hospitalized, particularly when they receive antibiotic treatment for long periods of time.
 - c. Persons with weakened immune systems such as patients in intensive care units, or in cancer or transplant wards.
 - d. Persons who have undergone surgical procedures such as abdominal or chest surgery.
 - e. Persons with medical devices that stay in for some time such as urinary catheters or central intravenous (IV) catheters.
 - f. People who are colonized with VRE.
4. **How common is VRE?** - VRE was not reported in United States hospitals until 1989. Data reported to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) during 2004 showed that VRE caused about 1 of every 3 infections in hospital intensive care units.
5. **What is the treatment for VRE?** - Most VRE infections can be treated with antibiotics other than vancomycin. Laboratory testing can determine which antibiotics are effective for treatment. For persons who get VRE infections and have urinary catheters, removal of the catheter when it is no longer needed can help to get rid of the infection. People who are colonized (bacteria are present, but have no symptoms of an infection) with VRE do not usually need treatment.

6. **How is VRE spread?** - VRE is usually spread indirectly via the hands of healthcare providers after contact with other people with VRE or with contaminated environmental surfaces. VRE is not spread through the air by coughing or sneezing.

7. **How can I prevent the spread of VRE?** - If you or someone in your household has VRE, the following are some measures to prevent spread of VRE:
 - a. Always wash your hands thoroughly after using the bathroom and before preparing food. Clean your hands after contact with persons who have VRE. Wash with soap and water (particularly when visibly soiled) or clean with alcohol-based hand cleaner.

 - b. Frequently clean areas of your home such as your bathroom that may become contaminated with VRE. Use a household disinfectant or a mixture of one-fourth cup bleach and one quart of water to clean those areas and surfaces that are touched frequently.

 - c. Wear gloves if you may come in contact with body fluids that may contain VRE, such as stool or bandages from infected wounds. Always wash your hands after removing gloves.

 - d. Be sure to tell any healthcare providers that you have VRE so that they are aware of your infection and can take special precautions to help prevent the spread of VRE to others.

8. **What should I do if I think I have VRE?** - Talk with your healthcare provider and get medical care if you think you have VRE.

9. **How is VRE diagnosed?** – VRE can only be diagnosed by collecting specimens to culture the bacteria and do appropriate tests to determine the bacteria’s patterns of resistance to antibiotics. There are no signs or symptoms that are specific to this infection.

10. **For more information about VRE:** - <http://www.cdc.gov/HAI/organisms/vre/vre.html>

This fact sheet provides general information. Please contact your physician and/or veterinarian for specific clinical information related to you or your animal.