

Vancomycin-Resistant *Enterococci* (VRE)

What is it?

- *Enterococci* are a type of bacteria that live in the stomach, intestines, urinary tract, mouth, female genital tract, and skin around the anal area in healthy people. They can also be found in the environment.
- Vancomycin-resistant enterococci (VRE) is a type of *Enterococcus* bacteria that has developed resistance to the antibiotic vancomycin.
- VRE infection is harder to treat than other types of infections.

VRE Colonization

- Colonization occurs when VRE is present in or on the body. The majority of individuals who have VRE are colonized, or carriers of the bacteria and have no signs or symptoms of illness.
- Hospitalized patients can also have VRE colonize sites where medical devices are inserted such as a urinary catheter.

VRE Infection

- Healthy people are at low risk for developing an infection, even if they are in contact with someone who has VRE. When the *Enterococci* get into an open wound they can cause infection. Less often, they can cause more serious infection of the blood, urinary tract, catheter sites or other body tissues.
- People at risk for developing VRE include those:
 - with weak immune systems
 - who have an invasive medical device such as a urinary catheter
 - who are colonized with VRE
 - who have previously had VRE infections
 - who were previously treated with antibiotics for a long period of time
 - who were recently hospitalized or had surgical procedures

How is it spread?

- VRE can be spread by either a colonized or infected person through:
 - Direct physical contact
 - Less commonly through contact with surfaces or objects contaminated by the bacteria such as toilet seats, door handles or soiled linens
 - Most commonly it is spread by the hands of health care workers or caregiver's hands. Contamination of the environment with VRE is more likely when a person has diarrhea since stool has the highest levels of these bacteria.
- VRE can live for weeks on surfaces and objects.

How is it treated?

- People who are colonized with VRE generally do not require treatment.
- People with VRE infections require treatment by their health care provider.

What precautions should I take at home?

- Infected people and their caregivers should wash hands well with soap and water for at least 15 seconds, or use alcohol-based hand rub, especially:
 - ✓ After using the toilet or assisting with toileting
 - ✓ After doing personal hygiene
 - ✓ Before preparing food, eating and drinking
 - ✓ Before and after touching a dressing or a wound
 - ✓ When hands are visibly soiled
 - ✓ Before leaving the home of a colonized or infected person
- Avoid sharing personal items such as towels.
- Disposable gloves should be worn if contact with bodily fluids is expected. Wash your hands after gloves are removed.
- Linens should be changed and washed on a routine basis and if they become soiled.
- Do routine cleaning and disinfection of the home environment and shared washrooms since the bacteria

can survive for weeks on surfaces.

- Notify health care workers if you are colonized or infected with VRE so precautions can be taken to protect other patients from VRE infection.

For further information, please contact the Communicable Disease Control Program staff at 705-474-1400 or 1-800-563-2808, ext. 5229.

References:

Health Link BC. BC Centre for Disease Control. (2017). Vancomycin-Resistant *Enterococci* (VRE). Retrieved from: <http://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthfiles/hfile74.stm>

Public Health Agency of Canada. (2010). Vancomycin-resistant Enterococci (VRE) Fact Sheet. Retrieved from: <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/nois-sinp/vre-erv-eng.php>

[Provincial Infectious Diseases Advisory Committee. Feb. 2013. Annex to Routine Practices and Additional Precautions. Annex A: Screening, Testing and Surveillance for Antibiotic-Resistant Organisms \(AROs\) in all Health Care Settings. Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. Toronto, Canada.](#)

Fact Sheet for WI-CDC-011 – 2018-08-10