Vancomycin–Resistant Enterococcus (VRE) Patient Education Sheet

What is VRE?

*Enterococcus* is a type of bacteria normally found in everyone’s gastrointestinal tract and sometimes in the vagina of females and are often found in the environment. Vancomycin resistance means that most antibiotics cannot kill this bacterium. *Enterococcus* can cause serious infections such as urinary tract infections, wound infections, or even infections of the blood.

Who gets VRE?

People who are likely to get Vancomycin–resistant *Enterococcus* are those who are very ill, have been in the hospital a long time, have a serious disease which harms the body’s ability to fight infection, and/or have had many antibiotics (medicine which fights bacteria).

Is VRE treatable?

Most VRE infections can be treated with antibiotics other than Vancomycin. The treatment of VRE is determined by laboratory testing to determine which antibiotics are effective. For persons who get VRE infections and have urinary catheters, removal of the catheter when it is not longer needed can help 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.

Can VRE spread?

People who are colonized or infected with VRE can spread it to other people. VRE can also be spread to objects and other surfaces in a room. VRE is almost always spread by physical contact and not through the air. Hospitals usually take special steps to prevent the spread of VRE from patient to patient by placing patients in isolation, using strict contact precautions.

What happens when I am isolated?

1. You are placed in a private room
2. Your movement from the room is limited to essential purposes only, such as for medical procedures or emergencies.
3. Healthcare workers are to put on gloves, gowns, and masks before entering your room. These items are to be removed and their hands washed immediately before they leave your room.
4. Your visitors will also be asked to put on this apparel while in your room. Purses should be placed into a plastic bag prior to being taken into the room. The purse should be removed from the plastic bag prior to leaving the room and the plastic bag should be placed in the trash can in the room. After removing the apparel, the visitors should also wash their hands before leaving your room to make sure they don’t take VRE out of the room with them. Used isolation apparel should be placed in the large trash container in your room. The isolation gown may be placed in the Linen hamper. Please check with the nurse.
5. Visitors and staff should not take items from inside your room that are not being discarded. This includes food items, medications, supplies, your water pitcher, or other personal items.
6. Isolation apparel should never be worn outside your room by anyone, staff or visitors alike.
7. Please share this information with family members or friends that may visit you while in the hospital and as them to comply with these requirements.
8. Your VRE status will be documented in the hospital computer and whenever you are readmitted you will be placed in isolation until the bacteria is gone.
How long will I be in isolation?

You will be placed in isolation until cultures show that the VRE is gone. Isolation may continue to be necessary for return visits to the hospital’s outpatient or inpatient departments. Before stopping isolation, three sets of cultures in a row must show that the bacteria are gone. These cultures are to be done at least one week apart beginning after you have been off all antibiotics for at least seven days. Cultures may have to be done even after you have been discharged. **If clearing cultures are not done while you are in the hospital, you should either contact your physician about having them done.**

What happens when it is time for me to go home?

Before you leave the hospital, be sure to ask the nurse or doctor about what precautions should be taken at home. In general, the following precautions are recommended for the care of a person with VRE at home.

1. Wash you hands after caring for the person with VRE. *Use antibacterial liquid soap (like Dial Soap) for hand washing and bathing the patient. Use a waterless hand rinse if possible and encourage frequent hand washing for all family members.*
2. Periodically clean the person’s room and personal items with a commercial disinfectant or a fresh solution of one part bleach and 100 parts water (for example, one tablespoon of bleach in one quart water).
3. Wear gloves if you handle body substances (blood, urine, wound drainage) and wash your hands after removing the gloves.
4. Other ideas for the home:
   a. Use disposable towels in the bathroom
   b. Do not reuse bath towels or bath cloths
   c. Do not share food or drinks
   d. No special cleaning of laundry or dishes is needed because the hot wash cycle reliably kills these bacteria
   e. Good soap and water washing of dishes followed by drying removes virtually all risk of spread.
   f. Good hand washing with soap and water or a alcohol−based hand cleaner by the patient and household members is necessary: always wash your hands thoroughly after using the bathroom, before preparing food, when there is visible soiling and after close contact with the infected person.
5. Once VRE patients leave the hospital and go home, they can return to their normal routine including going out in public because many activities in the community involve less risk for transmission.
6. Patients should tell anyone caring for them that they have VRE, this includes home health providers, nurses, therapists, doctor’s offices, and rescue squads.

INFECTION CONTROL VIDEOS

For more information please watch the "It’s Okay to Ask" video on the television set in your room.

If you have any additional questions, call Infection Control at 251−633−1095