

Yukon Hospital Corporation

Vancomycin Resistant *Enterococci* (VRE)

Fact Sheet for Clients, Resident, Family and Visitors

One of the test results shows you or your family member has a germ or bacteria called Vancomycin Resistant Enterococcus (VRE).

What are *Enterococci*?

Enterococci are bacteria or germs that are normally found in the bowel and usually do not cause illness. This is called colonization. *Enterococci* can cause wound and skin infections, and less often, more serious infections of the blood and other body sites.

What does antibiotic resistance mean?

Antibiotics are drugs used to treat infections caused by germs (bacteria). Sometimes these drugs will no longer kill the germs and these germs are called antibiotic resistant.

What is Vancomycin Resistant *Enterococci* (VRE)?

An antibiotic used to treat *enterococci* is a drug called vancomycin. Some *enterococci* are no longer killed by vancomycin and they are called Vancomycin Resistant *Enterococci* (VRE)

How does a person get VRE?

VRE can be found in the hospital, on people and objects. VRE can be passed by hands of health care workers from a person who is either sick with VRE or just carrying the bacteria harmlessly in their bowel. Residents in personal care homes are at a lower risk for VRE but a long stay in hospital, receiving a lot of antibiotics, or contact with an individual or equipment that has VRE might increase their risk. VRE can also live on equipment touched by a person with VRE. It can be spread from one person to another by directly or indirectly touching something the VRE bacteria is on.

Who gets VRE?

Patients in hospitals who have open wounds, catheters or drainage tubes and those who are very sick are most likely to get VRE. The general public living in the community who are in good health are at low risk of getting VRE, so there is generally no need for special precautions in their home.

Why are special precautions needed?

Special precautions are taken during a hospital stay and may be taken with a resident in a personal care home to stop VRE from spreading to other patients/residents.

What are the special precautions?

Some of the precautions may include:

- Having the patient remain in a private room.
- A sign placed on the room door of the room to alert everyone of the precautions needed.
- Everyone must wash their hands or use alcohol-based handrub (sanitizer) when leaving the room.
- If the patient has to leave their room, their hands must be washed well or an alcohol-based handrub (sanitizer) used as well as skin wounds covered.
- If a patient is in the hospital they may not be able to go to other areas of the hospital or cafeteria.

What about family and visitors?

Family and friends can visit but they will be told to wash their hands or use an alcohol-based handrub (sanitizer) before leaving the room. Visitors may still have close contact such as hugging, kissing and hand holding. Family members rarely get VRE. If they do, it does not usually cause a problem. Patients/Residents with VRE do not pose a risk to their families or to other healthy people.

What about at home?

There are no special precautions at home except people should wash their hands often. Hands should be washed after going to the bathroom, or touching their wound. This is always good to do to prevent the spread of germs and not just because someone has VRE.

How can the person with VRE help?

- Remind all staff and visitors to wash their hands or use an alcohol-based handrub (sanitizer) before and after they touch a VRE positive individual or are in the room.
- The person who has VRE should wash their hands well or use an alcohol-based handrub (sanitizer) often. When washing their hands, turn off the taps with a paper towel to avoid getting hands dirty again.
- If another doctor, hospital, clinic is visited or they receive home care, it is important for you to tell staff that they have VRE.

Good handwashing or using alcohol-based handrub (sanitizer) is the best way to prevent the spread of these germs.