

Frequently Asked Questions about...

Vancomycin-resistant Enterococci (VRE)

Q. What are vancomycin-resistant *Enterococci*?

A. Vancomycin-resistant *Enterococci*, or “VRE”, are a group of bacteria that are resistant to vancomycin, one of the “last resort” antibiotics commonly used to treat drug-resistant bacteria.

Q. Where are VRE found?

A. *Enterococci* are naturally found in the intestines of humans and other animals. Only certain strains of *Enterococci* are resistant to vancomycin. These strains are usually found in healthcare or residential settings where antibiotic use is common.

Q. What are the symptoms of infection?

A. People infected with VRE may not exhibit any symptoms. Sometimes, infections with VRE become invasive. In these cases, the bacteria infect a part of the body (such as blood or other tissues) that is normally sterile. Invasive infections can become serious health problems and require medical attention.

Q. How does someone catch VRE?

A. VRE can be transmitted through direct person-to-person contact. Transmission can also occur via indirect contact with a variety of items in the environment such as bed rails, door knobs, wheelchairs, or resident care equipment that have come into contact with a person with VRE.

Q. Why may assisted living facility (ALF) or nursing home (NH) residents be at risk for contracting VRE?

A. Many ALF or NH residents are susceptible to VRE infections because they possess one or more risk factors for VRE infection such as underlying illness, immunosuppression, recent abdominal surgery, urinary or venous catheter use, prolonged hospital admissions, and long-term treatment with antibiotics.

Q. Can VRE be treated?

A. Yes, but it can be difficult to treat successfully. Because vancomycin is a “last resort” antibiotic and is not an effective treatment for VRE, there are very few other drugs that are effective at treating VRE infections. If treatment is needed, appropriate antibiotics will be chosen by a physician based on current resistance patterns.

Q. What is the best way to prevent the spread of VRE?

A. The best way to prevent the spread of VRE from person-to-person is through frequent hand washing and regular and thorough environmental cleaning with an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-registered disinfectant. In addition, medical care providers should practice good antibiotic stewardship when prescribing antibiotics to prevent the further development of resistant strains of bacteria.

Contact your local health department if you have additional questions about VRE