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 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 items in the environment such as bed rails, door knobs, wheelchairs, or patient care equipment that have come into contact with a person with VRE.

Q. Why may patients in healthcare facilities be at risk for contracting VRE?

A. Many patients 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 hygiene 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

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Protecting You and Your Environment

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