



Vancomycin-Resistant Enterococci (VRE) Fact Sheet

What is it?

Enterococci bacteria are commonly found in the bowels, urinary tract and the environment and normally do not cause illness. In cases where illness occurs, it is treated with antibiotics. VRE occurs when enterococcus bacteria become resistant to the antibiotic vancomycin. Vancomycin is used when other more commonly used antibiotics such as penicillin are not effective.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms vary depending on the site of infection. Infection can occur anywhere in the body. Some common sites include the intestines, the urinary tract and wounds. Patients with a urinary infection may experience burning on urination, more frequent urination, back pain and fever.

Who is at risk?

Individuals with weakened immune systems, those who have been treated with vancomycin or other antibiotics for long periods of time, and those who have undergone medical procedures and require catheterization are at higher risk.

How is it treated?

People who are colonized with VRE do not usually need any treatment. Most VRE infections can be treated successfully with antibiotics other than vancomycin.

How does it spread?

VRE is transmitted most often in healthcare facilities. It can be picked up from surfaces and equipment such as toilet seats, door handles and bedrails. Health care workers can also carry it on their hands and spread it from one patient to another.

How can it be prevented?

Proper hand hygiene is one of the most effective ways to reduce the risk of acquiring an infection, including VRE. Wash your hands thoroughly after using the bathroom, before preparing food, or after contact with a person who has VRE. Wash with soap and water or use alcohol-based hand rubs. It is important to remember that these bacteria can survive for weeks on surfaces and objects, so you should regularly clean areas such as bathrooms and frequently touched surfaces (e.g. door handles).

Other Questions?

Talk to your health care provider or call our Communicable Disease Program at 613-966-5500 x349. Toll Free 1-800-267-2803 | TTY Dial 711 (1-800-267-6511) | www.hpepublichealth.ca

References

- Heymann, D.L. (2008). *Control of Communicable Disease Manual* (19th Ed). Washington, DC: American Public Health Association
- Public Health Agency of Canada, November 2010

CD-4

2013/07/16

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