

Vancomycin-resistant Enterococci (VRE)

What is VRE?

Vancomycin-Resistant Enterococci (*VRE*) are a type of bacteria that live in the intestine and female genital tract. They are no longer able to be killed by the antibiotic Vancomycin. Normally these bacteria do not cause a problem. *VRE* is commonly spread by direct contact with an infected person, usually with the hands. Most *VRE* infections are acquired in hospital. Cleaning your hands is the number one way to prevent the spread of *VRE*.

How is VRE spread?

VRE is spread from one person to another by contact, usually on the hands of caregivers. *VRE* can be present on the caregiver's hands either from touching contaminated material excreted by an infected person or from touching articles soiled by feces. *VRE* can survive well on hands and can survive for weeks on objects such as toilet seats, taps, door handles, bedrails, furniture and bedpans. *VRE* is easy to kill with the proper use of disinfectants and good hand hygiene.

What are the symptoms of VRE?

You can have *VRE* present in your body without being sick. A person with *VRE* who does **not** have symptoms is colonized with *VRE*. A person is considered to be infected with *VRE* when symptoms **are** present (e.g. an infection of the urinary tract or bloodstream). www.publichealth.gc.ca

How is VRE diagnosed?

To diagnose a *VRE* infection, a sample from the infected area is taken. The type of sampling depends on the type of infection, however often urine samples or wound swabs are taken. The sample is then sent to the laboratory. If the sample tests positive for *VRE*, it is tested further to determine which antibiotics may be effective for treating the infection.

How is VRE treated?

People who are colonized (bacteria are present, but they have no symptoms of an infection) with *VRE* do not usually need treatment. Most *VRE* infections can be treated successfully with antibiotics other than vancomycin. Laboratory testing of the *VRE* sample can determine which antibiotics will successfully treat the infection.

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What special precautions are required to prevent the spread of VRE?

Hand washing with soap and water is important during a VRE infection and is one of the best defenses against further spread of the bacteria.

It is important that special precautions are taken to stop *VRE* from spreading to other clients, staff and visitors at Casey House.

If diagnosed with *VRE*:

- A yellow contact precaution sign will be placed on your door which indicates to health care workers, family and visitors of the need to wear special personal protective equipment when inside your room.
- You will be instructed to wear a fresh gown and gloves when outside your room to decrease the risk of transmission to other clients, staff and visitors.
- Your activities outside your room may be restricted (ie. Recreational activities) because *VRE* can spread

easily in hospital. This helps us protect other clients, staff and visitors.

- In some cases, equipment used in your daily care will remain in your room.
- You cannot share any personal items, including towels, washcloths, razors, soap, creams, lotions, cosmetics, toothbrushes, nail files, combs and brushes.
- Avoid touching any open sores, and if you do wash your hands immediately.
- You cannot share any personal items including towels, washcloths, razors, soap, creams, lotions, cosmetics, toothbrushes, nail files, combs and brushes.
- Equipment used in your daily care will remain in your room (e.g. stethoscope, thermometer)
- A laundry hamper will be left in your room for linen and your own clothes.
- Disposable plastic cutlery, plates and cups will be used and should be discarded in your room garbage.
- You are requested to limit the number of personal items from home you introduce into your room.
- Everyone must wash their hands when leaving your room with alcohol based hand sanitizer or soap and water.

Good hand hygiene practices

You will be taught how to clean your hands with soap and water and with an alcohol based hand sanitizer. Important times you need to clean your hands are:

- After using the bathroom or assisting someone to use the toilet
- After blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing
- Before you prepare food
- After touching / petting pets or animals
- Before eating and drinking
- When your hands are visibly dirty (soiled)
- After handling dirty laundry
- Before you leave your room

**Health care workers, visitors, family and friends must wash their hands when they enter and when they leave your room. Do not be shy about reminding everyone to wash his or her hands.
Clean hands are everyone's responsibility.**

What about family/visitors?

- Upon arrival at Casey House, your visitors, family and friends need to check in with the clinical staff at the second floor nursing station.
- Your family and visitors will be required to wear a disposable long-sleeved yellow gown and gloves while in your room.
- Your family and visitors will need to dispose of their gown and gloves in the garbage container provided in your room; they must avoid touching anything and must wash their hands upon exiting your room using an alcohol based hand sanitizer.
- Family and visitors should not assist other patients with their care as they may inadvertently transfer VRE to another client.
- Everyone must wash their hands when leaving your room using an alcohol based hand sanitizer or soap water.
- Consider delaying in-person visits from vulnerable or at-risk people who may be susceptible to a VRE infection.

What will happen when I leave Casey House?

If you have *VRE* at the time you are being discharged from Casey House, the chance of spreading the germ to your family and friends is small but we do recommend you, your family and household visitors practice the following:

- Everyone who might help you with your personal hygiene or with going to the toilet should wash their hands after contact with you.
- Wash your hands before you prepare any food and before you eat. This practice should be followed by everyone in the household.
- Wash your hands well after using the toilet. Make sure others that use the bathroom wash their hands well afterwards.
- Clothing can be laundered in the same manner as the rest of the household laundry.
- No special cleaning is required of furniture or items (e.g. dishes) in the home.
- If you share a bathroom at home, clean the toilet and sink at least weekly with a germicidal cleanser.
- Always tell your physician, paramedics, nurses or other care providers that you have *VRE*. This helps prevent spread to others.

AT HOME:

What is the proper way to clean?

- People with diarrhea are much more likely to spread bacteria into the environment ; use a bleach-containing cleaner for the bathroom and high touch areas. If using bleach alone, then mix fresh daily one part bleach to ten parts water (1:10 solution).
- Put on gloves.
- Wet the surface well and clean well.
- Allow the surface to air dry.
- Pay special attention to areas that may be soiled with feces such as the toilet (don't forget the flush handle) and sink and areas that are touched frequently such as door knobs and light switches.
- Wash hands with soap and water or alcohol based hand sanitizer.

What is the proper way to wash my clothes?

- Wash the clothing of the person with *VRE* separate from the other laundry to prevent the bacteria from getting on other household member's clothing or household linen.
- If clothes are heavily soiled with feces and/or body fluids
 - Put on disposable gloves
 - Rinse off stool in toilet
 - Wash clothes/fabrics separately from other laundry.
- Wash hands with soap and water or alcohol based hand sanitizer.
- Use the hot water cycle with soap, use bleach when fabric appropriate.
- Dry items in the dryer on high heat, if possible.

What is the proper way to clean the dishes?

- Soap and water are very effective for cleaning dishes, as is a standard residential dishwasher.
- If you want to disinfect your dishes use a diluted bleach solution of 1 tablespoon bleach in 1 gallon of water and allow them to air dry.