

## VRE: A Guide for Care

Enterococcus is a common strep bacteria naturally located within the intestinal tract. It can cause inflammation and infection if introduced elsewhere within the body, such as a cut, and must be treated with an antibiotic. Some strains of enterococci have become resistant to the antibiotic vancomycin, making the infection more difficult to treat. This new resistant germ is called vancomycin-resistant enterococcus (VRE).

### About VRE

VRE is most often found in the stool, but it can also live in the urine, blood, wounds or female genital tract (vagina). It can also live on environmental surfaces. Many people with VRE have no signs of illness or infection, but they can carry the bacteria and VRE to others. Healthy people rarely get VRE.

People at a higher risk of developing VRE are those with a weakened immune system, the elderly, people with open surgical sites or other wounds, those who have taken many antibiotics, critically ill patients and patients with tubes entering their bodies (such as urinary catheters). People with diarrhea due to C. difficile are also at higher risk.

### Treating VRE and Preventing the Spread of Infection

Antibiotics are used to treat VRE infection and the doctor performs tests to identify the best treatment options for your loved one. Eliminating VRE can take more than a year.

VRE can be passed to others by touching the skin or belongings of someone carrying the bacteria. Hands are the most common way to spread ALL germs, including VRE. People with VRE should avoid:

- Sharing items like towels, razors and clothing.
- Touching inside the nose and/or dressings and then objects in the environment.
- Using saunas or whirlpools.
- Getting manicures, massages and other spa services.

Avoid exposing others, especially children, by maintaining a clean environment and closely monitoring their actions. Make certain everyone washes their hands and uses hand sanitizer frequently. Both methods reduce transmission of VRE.

To prevent the spread of VRE, the patient should remain in a room by him- or herself at home. The patient, family members and visitors should frequently wash hands for 40 to 60 seconds or use a hand sanitizer to disinfect hands. Hand sanitizer should contain at least 60 percent alcohol content and can be found in the hand soap section at most stores. Caregivers should perform hand hygiene before and after providing care. Gloves should be worn to handle any dressings and discarded dressings should be placed in a tied plastic bag. It is important to always wash hands or use hand sanitizer after removing gloves.

Follow these tips to prevent the spread of VRE:

- Avoid touching dirty items prior to touching clean items or environmental surfaces.
- A clean environment, including personal items, is very important! Clean hard surfaces with a store-bought disinfectant or use a mixture of bleach solution of:  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup bleach to  $2\frac{1}{4}$  cup water (mixed fresh every day). Let the surface air dry.
- Change clothing daily and wash clothes before wearing again. Launder clothes using hot water, detergent, bleach and use a hot dryer temperature. Disinfect washer with bleach after usage.
- Wash hands or use hand sanitizer immediately before leaving home. Avoid touching the inside of your nose and any environmental surfaces after hand disinfection.
- Because it is very important to protect others from VRE, if the patient visits another doctor, hospital or healthcare provider, tell the provider of the history of VRE infection and where it is (or was) found (for example, in the urine, nose, lungs).

Call Empath Health with any questions (888) 855-2838:

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