



## Community Health Connections

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## Fact Sheet

# VRE (Vancomycin Resistant Enterococci)

Enterococci are bacteria that are found normally in the human intestines, the female genital tract, and can often be found in the environment. At times these bacteria can cause infection. Vancomycin is an antibiotic that is often used to treat infections caused by enterococci. In some cases, enterococci have become resistant to this drug and are then called "Vancomycin resistant enterococci" or VRE.

### How common are VRE infections?

VRE was not reported in the U.S. until the year 1989. VRE is responsible for about one to three infections in hospital intensive care units.

### What type of infections can VRE cause?

VRE can live in the human intestines and female genital tract without causing disease. However, sometimes, it can be the cause of urinary tract infections, blood stream infections, and wound infections.

### Who is at risk for getting VRE?

The following categories of people are at a higher risk of becoming infected.

- People who have been treated with vancomycin and/or combinations of other antibiotics such as penicillin and gentamicin.
- People who have been hospitalized, especially if they have received antibiotic therapy for long period of time.
- People who have weakened immune systems, such as people with AIDS/HIV, people who are on some type of chemotherapy, people in ICU's, or people with transplants
- People who have had surgical procedures such as abdominal or chest surgery.
- People with medical devices that stay in for some time, such as urinary catheter, IV lines.

### How is VRE spread?

VRE is not spread through the air by coughing or sneezing. It is spread to others by direct contact with stool, urine, or blood containing VRE. It can also be spread by indirect contact via the hands of a healthcare provider.

### How can I prevent the spread of VRE?

If you or someone you care for has VRE, the following steps are some measures to take to prevent the spread.

- Wash your hands after using the bathroom and before preparing food. Clean your hands after close contact with persons who have VRE.
- Frequently clean area of your home, such as your bathroom that may become contaminated with VRE. Use a household disinfectant or a mixture of ¼ cup bleach and one quart water to clean those areas and surfaces that are touched frequently.

- Wear gloves if you may come in contact with body fluids that may contain VRE, such as stool. Always wash your hands after you remove your gloves.

**What should I do if I think I have VRE?**

Talk with your healthcare provider.

**Is VRE treatable?**

Yes. Most VRE infections can be treated with antibiotics. Treatment will depend on many different factors, and you should follow your healthcare provider's instructions.