

Vancomycin Resistant Enterococci (VRE) - Frequently Asked Questions

What is VRE?

Enterococci are germs that live in the gastrointestinal tract (bowels) of most individuals and generally do not cause harm. VRE are strains of enterococci that are resistant to the antibiotic Vancomycin. If a person has an infection caused by VRE, it may be more difficult to treat.

Who is at risk of contracting VRE?

Risk factors for VRE acquisition include severe underlying illness, presence of invasive devices, prior colonization with VRE, antibiotic use and longer hospital stay.

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 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 inanimate objects such as toilet seats, taps, door handles, bedrails, furniture.

Can someone die from VRE?

Generally, people do not die if they are infected with VRE. In severe cases, VRE bacteremias can lead to death. This is rare and tends to occur in those people with other severe health problems. The vast majority of people recover from VRE, once their health is restored.

What preventative measures can be taken?

Health care providers and visitors should always practice good hand hygiene before and after patient contact, after using the bathroom, blowing your nose, before handling food etc. VRE is easy to kill with the use of disinfectants. Family and visitors should not assist other patients with their personal care

Public reporting of our infection rates is important because it will allow us to work with a standardized approach across the province.

What is the treatment for VRE?

If a patient is simply carrying VRE, no treatment is necessary, as the organism will be cleared on its own when the person's health is restored. If it is determined that the patient is infected (they have a blood infection, urine infection or wound infection) then the patient will be treated with the appropriate antibiotic as determined by a physician.