

# NIH Clinical Center Patient Education Materials

## Surveillance cultures for VRE

### What is VRE?

*Enterococcus faecium* is a germ normally found in our digestive tract. Vancomycin-resistant *Enterococcus* (VRE) is a type of germ that is resistant to some antibiotics (such as vancomycin). Sometimes, VRE can be found in our bodies without causing an infection; this is called “colonization.” Sometimes, it can cause an infection that may be hard to treat.

### Resources

- Patient Information—Vancomycin-Resistant *Enterococcus* (VRE)
- Patient Information—Hand Hygiene

### What are surveillance cultures?

- This test (a rectal swab) helps us determine whether you are colonized with VRE.
- The test may be repeated once a week while you are an inpatient.
- A medical staff member must perform this test; you cannot perform this test yourself.

### What happens if my surveillance culture is positive for VRE?

If VRE is found, you will be put on contact isolation to stop it from spreading to other patients. Staff will tell you about the isolation requirements at that time. You will stay on isolation until the Hospital Epidemiology Service determines that VRE is no longer present.

### How will isolation affect me, my family, and visitors?

For information, please read “Patient Information—Contact Isolation.”

### What will my care providers do differently?

If you are found to have VRE, you will still receive the same care and treatment when you are on isolation. Staff will wear gloves and a gown when they are in the room and caring for you.

### How will I get rid of VRE?

- If you have VRE, your doctors will treat it. If you are colonized with VRE, it may go away without treatment.
- You can remove VRE from your hands by proper hand washing or by using alcohol hand rub. VRE on objects in your surroundings can be removed by cleaning with a disinfectant.

### Questions?

Ask your nurse or doctor, or call the Hospital Epidemiology Service at 301-496-2209. For more information, please visit the [NIH Clinical Center's Patient Portal](#).

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