

# NIH Clinical Center Patient Education Materials

## Vancomycin-Resistant *Enterococcus* (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.

### How can someone get VRE?

You can get VRE when germs in your body become resistant to antibiotics. You can also get VRE in the community or in a hospital from someone else who has VRE. It is spread by close contact with a person with VRE or contaminated objects in their surroundings. Most VRE infections occur in health care settings, like hospitals and clinics. VRE can cause infections of the urinary tract, the bloodstream, and wounds.

### How does the Clinical Center test for VRE?

- If you have an infection, VRE may grow in your cultures when lab tests are done.
- To find out if you are colonized with VRE in your digestive tract, a rectal swab will be collected. This test is not painful and may be repeated while you are at the hospital.
- A medical staff member must perform this test: you cannot perform this test yourself.

### Important things to know

- Read “Patient Information—Hand Hygiene.”
- Read “Patient Information—Contact Isolation.”

### Hand Hygiene

*Hand hygiene* is the most important way to prevent the spread of germs. Wash your hands with soap and water or use alcohol hand rub often. Ask your care providers and visitors to wash their hands frequently.

### Patients

#### Isolation

- You will be on contact isolation at the hospital to stop your VRE from accidentally spreading to other people.
- You must follow the directions given in the *Contact Isolation and Hand Hygiene* information sheets.

#### Gowns and gloves

Staff will wear a gown and gloves when they are in your room.

#### Family and visitors

All visitors must follow the directions given in the *Contact Isolation and Hand Hygiene* information sheets.

## How do I get rid of VRE?

- If you have an infection, the doctor will treat it. If you are colonized with VRE, it may go away without treatment.
- VRE on hands can be removed by good hand hygiene.
- VRE on objects in your surroundings can be killed by cleaning with disinfectant.

## When will isolation end?

- You may be on isolation for a few hours or for several months. Your care provider will tell you when your isolation ends.
- You will be on isolation as an inpatient and outpatient until the Hospital Epidemiology Service determines that isolation is no longer needed.
- Isolation does not determine the length of your hospital stay.

## Be informed. Be empowered. Be prepared.

### Questions?

Ask your nurse, doctor, or call the Hospital Epidemiology Service at 301-496-2209.

For more information visit the NIH Clinical Center's Patient Portal:

[http://patientportal.cc.nih.gov/pt\\_care/patient\\_infection\\_control.shtml](http://patientportal.cc.nih.gov/pt_care/patient_infection_control.shtml)

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Questions about the NIH Clinical Center?

<http://www.cc.nih.gov/comments.shtml>

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