



# TIMMINS AND DISTRICT HOSPITAL

## Infection Control

### Vancomycin Resistant Enterococcus

#### *Questions and Answers*

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One of your tests show that you are carrying **VRE (vancomycin resistant enterococcus)**. Staff must now take special precautions when taking care of you. This information sheet may help you and your family to understand the procedures more clearly.

#### **What is an Antibiotic Resistant Organism?**

When someone has an infection, antibiotics are medicines that are used to kill the germ (bacteria) causing the infection. An antibiotic resistant organism is not killed by the usual antibiotics. If an antibiotic resistant organism causes an infection, then a stronger antibiotic must be used.

#### **What is Vancomycin Resistant Enterococcus?**

Enterococcus is a bacteria that lives in most people's bowels. Vancomycin resistant enterococcus is the same bacteria, but it is a strain that has developed resistance to many commonly used antibiotics, specifically an antibiotic called vancomycin.

#### **Can it Be Harmful?**

Enterococcus is a normal germ which does not harm people and is needed to keep people healthy. In hospital if the germs get passed to another part of the body they can cause an infection. When a person has an infection with VRE it can be difficult to treat because the usual antibiotics cannot get rid of it.

#### **How Did I Get VRE?**

People who are in hospitals or nursing homes get VRE. It is spread by contact with the hands. Care givers can unknowingly transmit the germ during routine activities and procedures between patients.

#### **Why Are Special Precautions Needed?**

Special precautions are needed in order to prevent the spread of this organism to other patients in the hospital who are also ill and more likely to develop an infection.

#### **What Will Be Different?**

- You will need to stay in your room.
- People who are taking care of you will wear gowns and gloves to prevent them from picking up the VRE and from taking it to other patients.
- It is very important for all staff and visitors to wash their hands when they come in and when they leave your room.
- Signs will be placed outside the room to remind everyone about the special precautions.

- If you need to go to another part of the hospital for tests or treatments, you must wash your hands before you leave your room.
- Please wash your hands carefully after going to the bathroom.
- VRE lives on objects in the room, so the room will be cleaned very well.
- You will have cultures taken from the rectum or your stool on a regular basis.

### **What About Family and Visitors?**

You may still have visitors. They must wash their hands when they come in and when they leave. They must put on gowns and gloves too.

### **What Will Happen When I Leave the Hospital?**

If you go to another health care facility or of you have services from Home Care, some precautions may still be taken. This is to prevent your care givers from picking up the bacteria and spreading it to other patients. Good hand washing is very important to reduce the risk of spread.

### **What About When I Go Home?**

If your family and friends do not look after other sick people, there is no need to worry. Vancomycin resistant enterococcus is no more dangerous than other normal bacteria that people carry in their bowels and are exposed to every day. Remind everyone to wash their hands often. You should wash your hands after you go to the bathroom.

### **Will This Go Away?**

Sometimes this bacteria just remains in our bowels and does not cause any harm. This is called being a “carrier” and it does not require any special treatment. Sometimes our body will eventually clear itself of VRE by its natural healing and cleansing action. You will be checked regularly to see if you still have VRE in your bowels. After a series of tests (usually three sets, at least a week apart) do not show any VRE, you can come out of isolation. If you are still in hospital, you will stay in a private room, and you will continue to be checked to make sure you still do not have VRE.

### **How Can I Help?**

If you go to another Doctor or to another Hospital please tell your Doctor and Nurse or other care giver you were once on special precautions for VRE. This will allow them to check your status to make sure that they don't carry the organism to other patients.

## **WASH YOUR HANDS OFTEN AND WELL**

### **What if I Am Admitted to the Hospital Again?**

On any future admissions to the hospital, you may be placed in a single room and special precautions will be taken. Swabs of your rectum and any wounds or a stool sample will be taken to make sure there is no VRE. Even if special precautions are not being followed, we may keep you in a private room and check regularly to make sure that the VRE does not come back.

### **Additional questions?**

Contact Infection Control at Ext# 2847

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