Vancomycin Resistant Enterococcus (VRE)

What is enterococcus?

Enterococcus is a bacterium that normally lives in the intestines and is typically present in all of us. It is part of normal bacteria flora.

What is VRE?

VRE refers to a type of enterococcus which has become resistant to the antibiotic, Vancomycin. Vancomycin is one of the most potent antibiotic available, and the only antibiotic that cures certain serious infections.

Why would my child carry VRE in the intestine?

Individuals who carry VRE as part of their normal flora generally:

- Have been hospitalized for longer than a week.
- Have been cared for in chronic care facilities.
- Have a condition that affects the body’s ability to fight infection (cancer, HIV, surgical patients in intensive care units).
- Have received vancomycin frequently (for example, dialysis, cancer, or transplant patients).

Why are hospitals concerned with VRE?

Health care experts are concerned that VRE bacteria could transfer resistance factors to other types of bacteria. It is also easily spread to others from those in contact with the patient or with the patient’s environment. Rarely, individuals who carry VRE can develop an infection due to this germ. There are new types of antibiotics to treat VRE infection. These antibiotics are saved for these rare cases. However, these antibiotics do not get rid of VRE in the intestines.

How do you test for VRE?

A stool specimen or a swab of your child’s rectum can be sent for a culture to determine if your child carries VRE. If this test is positive, special precautions will be used so VRE doesn’t spread to others in the hospital.

If my child has VRE in the intestine, will he have signs and symptoms of infection?

No. If your child is a carrier, the bacterium produces no ill effects.

Is my child contagious?

VRE is spread from person to person contact and can be spread through objects used in the hospital environment. Special precautions will be used for the length of your child’s stay to prevent the spread of VRE to others.
What special precautions do hospitals use to prevent the spread of VRE?

Your child’s nurse will tell you the special precautions. Your child will be in a private room and needs to stay in his room except for special medical procedures. He may go to tests as needed but should not walk up and down the halls or go to common areas such as the playroom, cafeteria, or gift shop. Everyone entering the child's room (including parents) will need to wear a gown and gloves. Before leaving the room, gowns and gloves should be removed, then hands should be washed for 10 to 15 seconds. The risk of spreading VRE to healthy children and adults is low. After going home, your child can return to his normal routine. Frequent and good hand washing should always be done.

Does VRE go away?

About eight weeks after your child’s last positive culture, another culture will be checked. Normal bacteria may replace the VRE bacteria after antibiotics are discontinued and children are out of the hospital. Many children may carry the bacteria for many months.

Are there any ways to prevent VRE?

For children with chronic illness that have an increased need for antibiotics, there may not be a way to prevent them from becoming a carrier of VRE. There are some precautions that can help. Your child should only take antibiotics for an infection definitely caused by bacteria. Potent antibiotics should be avoided if another antibiotic that is less broad spectrum can be used. Good hand washing should always be done by the child and everyone in contact with him.

For more information, go to the CDC "Campaign to Prevent Antimicrobial Resistance in Healthcare Settings" (Get Smart Campaign) web site:

http://www.cdc.gov/getsmart/