

Vancomycin Resistant Enterococci (VRE)

Factsheet for healthcare workers

2 August 2023

Enterococci – Enterococci (*Enterococcus species*) are bacteria that most often live harmlessly in the bowel as part of the normal human gastrointestinal flora and in the female genital tract. Heavy use of antibiotics within healthcare settings can result in resistance to a range of antimicrobials. Vancomycin is an antibiotic used to often treat severe infections caused by enterococci.

Transmission – VRE can spread from one person to another through contact with contaminated surfaces and equipment or through person to person spread, often via contaminated hands. VRE can survive for long periods of time on objects (patient care equipment), surfaces (toilet areas and patient rooms), used gloves and hands. People who are colonised or have infections with VRE, and who have fecal incontinence or diarrhoea, have a colostomy or ileostomy, or are cognitively impaired may readily contaminate their environment and surroundings.

Why it is important to control the spread of VRE – Most people who are colonised do not develop infections, but serious VRE infections are associated with higher morbidity and mortality. Infections caused by VRE can be difficult to treat as there are a limited number of antibiotic treatments available. Patients receiving cancer treatment or dialysis, or those who are transplant recipients, frail or multimorbid are more likely to have clinical infections.

Are healthcare workers at risk? – VRE causes minimal risk to healthcare workers. By adhering to good hand hygiene practices, standard precautions and ensuring good cleaning and disinfection of the patient environment and care equipment, this risk is further reduced.

Do healthcare workers need to be screened for VRE? – No. Good infection prevention and control (IPC) practices such as hand hygiene and adherence to standard precautions is all that is required.

Where can I get more information? – Te Whatu Ora has released [Current core IPC strategies for VRE](#). Additional national guidance is being developed and will be released in due course. Contact your local IPC team or IPC@health.govt.nz if you require further information.

How can healthcare workers reduce transmission? – There are ways healthcare workers can assist in reducing cross-transmission:

- Practice standard precautions and adhere to hand hygiene – help people in your care to clean their hands if they are unable to do so themselves.
- Adhere to your healthcare policies and processes for VRE including implementation of contact precautions, patient placement and signage to advise others of the risk and what precautions others need to take and ensure good cleaning practices occur.
- Healthcare facilities should have screening policies in place to ensure early identification and preventative measures are acted upon to prevent unintentional and ongoing transmission. Make sure you know your local policies and when to screen patients or use extra precautions.
- Education – take the opportunity to educate others and/or contact your IPC team for further information.
- Check for patient alerts on medical records, or when necessary, update your alert system.