Enterococci are germs that can live in your intestine (in your belly) and can be in normal bowel movements. Sometimes, these germs can make you sick. When they make someone sick, the person is often given medicine called vancomycin. In some cases, the germs cannot be killed by this medicine. These germs that resist the medicine are called vancomycin–resistant enterococci (VRE).

How can VRE make my child sick?

VRE is usually spread from people’s hands. It can also be spread by touching objects or surfaces that have VRE germs on them.

Healthy people do not usually get sick from VRE germs, but St. Jude patients are at greater risk. If VRE gets in parts of the body that normally have no germs, such as the blood or urinary tract, it can cause very serious infection.

How are patients protected from VRE?

A patient can have VRE germs in the stool without being sick from them. In this case, we say that the patient is “colonized” with the germs. That patient can still spread the VRE germs to other patients. For this reason, a patient with VRE germs will be kept in a room by himself, called an isolation room.

Hospital staff members wear gowns and gloves when they are in the room with the patient. To learn more about patient isolation, see “Do you know… ACU isolation to prevent infection.”

How can VRE infection be treated?

If your child does become sick from VRE, other medicine besides vancomycin can usually make him better. But it can be hard to treat, and it can become life threatening. Because of this, you should take steps to protect your child and other St. Jude patients from VRE.

How can I keep my child from getting VRE?

The best way to protect yourself and your child is for both of you to clean your hands often.
Do you know... continued

VRE (vancomycin-resistant enterococci)

If you wash your hands with soap and water, press firmly and rub your hands together for 15–20 seconds, rinse well and dry thoroughly. If you use an alcohol-based gel or foam, place a palm-size amount in your hand, and rub your hands together until dry. To learn more about when and how to wash your hands, see “Do you know… Clean hands.”

Also, if you use the red wagons at St. Jude, please remember to use only wagons that have been cleaned by the staff. A clean wagon will have a white piece of tape across the top with the words “READY TO ROLL” printed in green.

Questions?

If you have further questions about VRE, talk to your child’s doctor or nurse.