

# Health Bulletin



## Keeping Germs At Bay In The Hospital

(NAPSA)—When most patients go to the hospital, it is with the hope of “getting better.” Unfortunately, it doesn’t always work out that way.

Health care-acquired infections are a growing concern in the United States—causing complications for patients and significant economical burdens to the health care system. In some cases, hospital-acquired infections result in death—with almost 100,000 patients dying each year.

“Bacteria found in hospitals are often resistant to many antibiotics, making hospital-acquired infections difficult to treat,” says Gary W. Procop, MD, FCAP, a pathologist at the Cleveland Clinic in Ohio. “In hospitals, bacteria can easily spread from patient to patient, health care worker to patient, or from environmental sources to the patient.”

Pathologists are physicians who examine cells and tissues to diagnose disease and illnesses. Dr. Procop specializes in microbiology and infectious disease pathology.

Two of the most common hospital-acquired infections are *Staphylococcus aureus*, particularly methicillin-resistant *S. aureus* (MRSA), and *Clostridium difficile*—commonly known as “C. diff.” MRSA is a kind of bacteria that causes “staph” infections; it can live on common surfaces, such as a table, for weeks and can be transmitted when someone touches it.

The most common place to come in contact with *C. difficile* is in a health care setting. It can live on bedrails, cart handles, bedpans, toilets, stethoscopes, telephones and remote controls. When you touch a contaminated surface and then your mouth, you can become infected.

“Something as simple as hand washing greatly decreases your chances of contracting or spread-



**When at the hospital, washing your hands can help protect your health—and the health of others.**

ing an infection while staying in the hospital or visiting friends or family members,” says Dr. Procop.

All hospitals should have a hospital infection control program, which includes promoting good hand washing among health care workers and isolating or rooming infected or colonized patients together.

The College of American Pathologists, an advocate for high-quality, cost-effective patient care, recommends that hospital infection control programs monitor the rates of hospital-acquired infections and promote interventions that reduce patients’ risks for these infections at their institutions.

As with many illnesses, your best defense is a strong offense. Wash your hands with warm soapy water for 15 to 30 seconds while you are in the hospital and before and after visiting a loved one. In addition, be sure that your doctor and nurse wash their hands before and after examining you. If they don’t, offer a gentle reminder.

For more information about preventing and understanding diseases, visit the Web site at [www.cap.org](http://www.cap.org).