

# Advice for Achieving a Clean Hospital

by *Kenneth A. Munson*

Given ongoing novel H1N1 activity to date, the CDC anticipates that there will be more cases, more hospitalizations and more deaths associated with this pandemic in the United States as we approach fall and winter. The novel H1N1 virus, in conjunction with regular seasonal influenza viruses, poses the potential to cause significant illness associated with hospitalizations and deaths during the U.S. influenza season.

Hospitals can be breeding grounds for germs and infections. Patients, and just as important, hospital staff, are subject to an environment where germs can easily and quickly spread. It's imperative with the onset of seasonal flus and the ongoing threat of H1N1 (swine flu) that the spread of germs be thwarted.

Naturally, one of the most critical preventative measures, to keep from contracting and transmitting the flu, is by washing your hands a minimum of 4 times per day. In fact, the CDC states that people who wash their hands at least four times a day have 24 percent fewer absences due to respiratory illnesses like the cold and flu, and half the absences due to stomach flu. In hospitals and medical facilities this is not enough.

Here are some suggestions designed to reduce transmission risk in a hospital:

**Wash your hands:** It starts with you. Frankly, there's no such thing as washing your hands too often in a hospital environment. Remind your staff to wash their hands when they walk in the office, frequently throughout the day, after they've been in physical contact with patients, and again when they leave at night. And be sure to stock antimicrobial soaps and plenty of alcohol-based antiseptic hand sanitizers for your staff to use. Don't leave it up to them to bring in their own.

**Remind patients and visitors to wash their hands:** It may seem unusual to ask your patients to wash their hands when they walk in the door, but chances are they'll thank you for doing so. To make this concept a reality, keep hand sanitizer in areas of the hospital where patients or visitors have easy access to it. Contact with germs can begin the moment one enters a hospital/medical facility. Touching doors and handles at the front entrance of the hospital, the visitor sign-in desk, etc. Staff can politely remind patients, visitors to make use of the sanitizer and explain that it's meant for their protection as well as others. Post signs in the restrooms requiring all visitors as well as employees to wash their hands with soap and warm water for at least 15 seconds after using the facility.

**Buy and use keyboard covers:** Computer keyboards are among the greatest hotbeds for germs, as they're touched by hospital staff all day long. Keyboards can be tough to keep clean, but that's not the case with keyboard covers, which can be quickly and easily wiped clean and disinfected. If the facility does not have computer covers available, the keyboards should be wiped daily with a solution of SpectraSan 24 liberally sprayed on a Microfiber cloth and wiped over the keys. This will at least provide some residual protection from the contamination of multiple users.

**Disinfect your phone everyday:** It is important to keep the mouthpiece and keypad of your phone cleaned with a disinfectant when you arrive and depart for the day. (Other key high touch zones include, elevator buttons, light switches, door handles, bathroom fixtures and flush handles, blood pressure cuffs, stethoscopes, and touch screen computer kiosks.

**Focus on fax and copy machines, and other shared office equipment:** The "enter" and "send" buttons on fax machines carry much higher concentrations of harmful germs than lesser used keys. That's also the case for the "copy" button on copy machines. Wipe down all the high touch zones+ spraying a disinfectant like SpectraSan 24 on a Microfiber cloth to provide residual efficacy.

**Disinfectant nursing stations frequently:** Nursing stations often have even higher levels of contamination on the high touch zones+because it is a fulcrum of activity on the inpatient hospital floor. Practically every function of the hospital intersects there at some point, so there is a lot of simultaneous work processes and a lot of impromptu interaction. This is a critical area where doctors, nurses, and aids share telephones, computer terminals, electronic medical data/carts, countertop space, chairs, and a myriad of other communal furnishings and medical devices. According to Environmental Health Services in St. Paul, Minn., the average work desk has 21,000 germs per square inch. Nursing stations can be breeding grounds for the transmission of infection and diseases if special care is not taken to frequently disinfect the hard, non porous surfaces that are shared by multiple caregivers from different shifts.

**Clean and disinfect remote controls:** Often handled and rarely cleaned, these devices can harbor bacteria and viruses. For a quick clean, remove the batteries. Use a cotton swab dipped in alcohol or cleaner and a toothpick to clean off the gunk in the hard-to-reach places. Put alcohol or another cleaner on a cloth, and wipe it down.

**Disinfect hand rails:** Hand rails in stairwells, on inpatient floors, in special handicap areas, in the lobby, waiting rooms, and other public areas in a healthcare facility should not be overlooked. Often used, but frequently forgotten when it comes to cleaning and disinfecting. Once again, a product like SpectraSan 24 that provides residual protection should be wiped thoroughly around all surfaces of the rails using a Microfiber cloth at least once per day.

**Cubicle divider curtains:** A study in Applied and Environmental Microbiology found that cubicle curtains that are not frequently disinfected or removed and cleaned are festering with bacteria and can breed pathogens such as infection-causing superbugs+like MRSA and VRE.

**Use a hospital-grade disinfectant:** Hospitals and medical care facilities should set stringent regulations regarding the use of disinfectants, soaps, antimicrobials and other products that are vital when attempting to fight the spread of germs. SpectraSan24i , for example, is the only EPA-registered hospital-grade disinfectant proven to provide 24 hours of residual effectiveness. SpectraSan24 has no harsh chemical smell, will not trigger allergic reactions or asthma attacks, has the EPA's lowest toxicity rating (IV) and, most importantly, it kills bacteria, viruses and fungi, including MRSA, VRE, SARS, E Coli, Salmonella and Influenza A (H1N1/swine flu).

The challenge facing doctors in their own offices is greater than ever,+said Dr. Art Gendelman, MD, executive vice president of clinical services at Carespring Health Care, in Ohio. According to the CDC, more than 2 million people are afflicted annually with a seasonal flu virus, with more than 250,000 hospitalized and as many as 36,000 dying,+he said. As a result of the swine flu pandemic, more people than ever are aware of and concerned about the spread of viruses. Patients at a hospital's office want to feel safe. Thus, it's important to keep them protected and also to let them know you're doing everything possible to do so. Making them- as well as your staff and yourself- part of that process will go a long way towards accomplishing that goal.+

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