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"Clean" Hospital Bath Basins Contaminated With Resistant Bugs

By Fran Lowry

SAN DIEGO (Reuters Health) Jan 21 - Clean-looking hospital bath basins are often contaminated with multi-drug resistant organisms, which means they're a serious potential source of infection, researchers said here at the 2011 annual Critical Care Congress of the Society of Critical Care Medicine.

"Health care workers could look at these basins which appear clean and not think that they needed to wash their hands after touching them and before touching a patient," said Dr. Keith Kaye from Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan.

He added that nosocomial infections are now the fifth leading cause of death in hospitals in the United States, with 25% occurring in intensive care units. "Many hospital-acquired infections are not even being reimbursed by Medicare anymore," he said.

In a study conducted at 53 U.S. and Canadian hospitals, Dr. Kaye and colleagues randomly selected bath basins for damp swab culture. A central laboratory tested for the presence of methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA), vancomycin-resistant *Enterococcus* (VRE) and Gram-negative bacilli.

All of the basins appeared clean to the naked eye and were not visibly soiled, Dr. Kaye said. But of the 576 basins they tested, 63.3% were contaminated.

Roughly a third of the basins - 199, or 34.6% -- from 52 hospitals (98.1%) were colonized with VRE. Gram-negative bacilli were found in 251 basins (43.6%) from 47 (88.7%) hospitals, and 24 (4.2%) basins from 19 (35.9%) hospitals were colonized with MRSA.

"In this day and age, where there is a growing need for hospitals to be vigilant about hospital-acquired infection rates, diagnosing hidden reservoirs of pathogens and multidrug resistant organisms can improve patients' safety and decrease infection rates," Dr. Kaye said.

Bath basins should never be shared between patients, he added. "If you are examining a wound or a device, like a line that's in a patient's vein, you must wash your hands after touching the basin, even if it's the patient's own basin, because these represent important reservoirs for bugs. Wash your hands before going on to the next patient."

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