

Madison Places Patient Safety **A B O V E** Health Care Competition

“Wash your hands”...(Our mothers were right!)

Proper hand hygiene is the best way to stop the spread of bacteria and viruses, whether it's influenza in the workplace, contamination of food in the kitchen—or spreading some types of infections in health care facilities.

Reminding everyone to wash his or her hands and making it convenient to do so in hospitals and clinics is one of the joint efforts of the Madison Patient Safety Collaborative (MPSC), an organization formed by area hospitals and medical groups in 2000 to further improve the safety of patient care provided in the community.

"Germs don't discriminate," Dr. Jeffery Jones, Chief of Staff at the William S. Middleton Memorial Veterans Hospital, observes. "Anyone can transport germs, and that's why it's important for all of us—even physicians—to remember to wash our hands. In fact, patients shouldn't feel intimidated about asking any health care provider or visitor to wash their hands before touching them."

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that each year nearly 2 million patients in the United States get an infection in the hospital.

"Everyone who comes into a patient's room is a member of the health-care team," says John Marx, MPH, Infection Control Practitioner at University of Wisconsin Hospital and Clinics. "Not only medical staff, but family members and friends. Every time anyone touches a patient without first washing his or her hands is another chance for that patient to come in contact with germs while the body is already in a more vulnerable state."

How clean is clean enough? When washing with warm water and soap, scrub for at least 15 seconds--about the time it takes to hum or whistle your way through one chorus of "On Wisconsin".

For a tip sheet on how you can help prevent infections or to find out more about MPSC projects, call 267-5889 or email aborgsdorf@meriter.com

To make hand hygiene easier, waterless alcohol-based hand rubs are now available, which can be used as an alternative to washing with soap and water in many instances. The CDC points out recent studies showing that these hand rubs reduce the number of bacteria on the hands more effectively than washing with soap and water, except when hands are visibly dirty, contaminated or soiled. In these instances—as you would after using the bathroom—washing for at least 15 seconds with warm water and soap is required.

MPSC members are making these waterless hand rubs available in patient rooms and many other areas, according to guidelines established by the CDC. The collective effort also included reminders for all health care providers and staff to use them.

"Hand hygiene was identified as an area that would benefit from a community-wide effort and the sharing of strategies to improve practices at each organization," says Mel Reppen, RN, CIC, Nurse Epidemiologist at St. Marys Hospital

Medical Center. In addition to advancing the use of the hand rubs, the MPSC is coordinating audits to measure adherence to recommended hand hygiene practices and reporting results to the providers. Heightened education on the importance of proper hand hygiene techniques and waterless products is also being provided.

"Now we have another convenient way to follow good advice that has been passed out for centuries—'Wash your hands,'" Mel Reppen says. "The arrival of 'flu season' is an opportune time for all of us to review hand hygiene practices, and remind ourselves and our family members that we have another convenient way to stop the spread of germs—by using these effective, waterless alcohol-based hand rubs."

