

Handwashing more important than isolation in controlling MRSA superbug infection

March 31 2009

Regular handwashing by hospital staff and visitors did more to prevent the spread of the MRSA superbug than isolating infected patients.

At the Society for General Microbiology meeting in Harrogate today (Tuesday 31 March), Dr Peter Wilson from University College Hospital, London, reported on a year-long study in two hospital intensive care units. In the middle six months of the year patients with MRSA were not moved to single rooms or nursed in separate MRSA bays. The rates of cross infection with MRSA were compared to the periods when patients were moved. Patients were tested for MRSA weekly and hand [hygiene](#) by staff and visitors audited and encouraged. There was no evidence of increased transmission of infection when patients were not moved.

Moving seriously-ill patients when they are identified as having MRSA can be hazardous and it involves ward staff in extra hygiene measures.

MRSA are *Staphylococcus aureus* bacteria that are resistant to the meticillin class of antibiotics. Many people carry these bacteria and it is generally not harmful if they are healthy. MRSA can cause serious illness in patients with weak or damaged immune systems and the elderly and it is widespread in hospitals. Treatment options are limited and it is vitally important to develop strategies to stop the spread of MRSA in healthcare environments.

"If a patient carrying MRSA is critically ill, moving them to a single room is less of a priority than clinical care," said Dr Wilson. "If the

criteria are strictly applied, compliance with hand hygiene practices on intensive care units is less than on a general ward because of the very high number of contacts per hour. Another study is needed in a general ward where a high level of compliance with hand hygiene is easier to achieve."

Source: Society for General Microbiology

Citation: Handwashing more important than isolation in controlling MRSA superbug infection (2009, March 31) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2009-03-handwashing-important-isolation-mrsa-superbug.html>

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