

# Hand hygiene lacking in many U.S. health care facilities: study

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Missing hand sanitizer, gaps in staff training may jeopardize efforts to stem spread of infection, researchers say.

(HealthDay)—One in five U.S. health care facilities does not make alcohol-based hand sanitizer available everywhere it's needed, new research shows.

And even though proper hand hygiene is essential to prevent health care-associated infections, staff may not always receive related training, the study suggests.

In all, 77.5 percent of the facilities in 42 states and Puerto Rico reported that alcohol-based sanitizer was regularly available at every point of care, reports the study published in the March issue of the *American Journal of Infection Control*.

Only about 50 percent of the 168 hospitals, outpatient care and long-term [care facilities](#) examined had money in their budgets set aside for hand-hygiene training, found the study led jointly by researchers from Columbia University School of Nursing in New York City and the World Health Organization (WHO).

"When hospitals don't focus heavily on hand hygiene, that puts patients at unnecessary risk for preventable health care-associated infections," study co-leader Laurie Conway, a registered nurse and graduate student at Columbia's School of Nursing, said in a university news release.

Health care-associated infections kill about 100,000 people annually in the United States, and cost about \$33 billion to treat, the news release pointed out.

Health care facilities are missing important opportunities to prevent such infections, the researchers report, and these gaps may start at the top.

One in 10 of the facilities in the study reported that senior management, such as the CEO, medical director or director of nursing, failed to make a clear commitment to improvements in [hand hygiene](#).

"The tone for compliance with [infection control](#) guidelines is set at the highest levels of management, and our study also found that executives aren't always doing all that they can to send a clear message that preventing infections is a priority," Conway said.

Hand hygiene guidelines were issued by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in 2002. The World Health Organization did the same in 2009, underlining the global importance of the issue.

**More information:** The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention explains the importance of [hand hygiene](#).

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