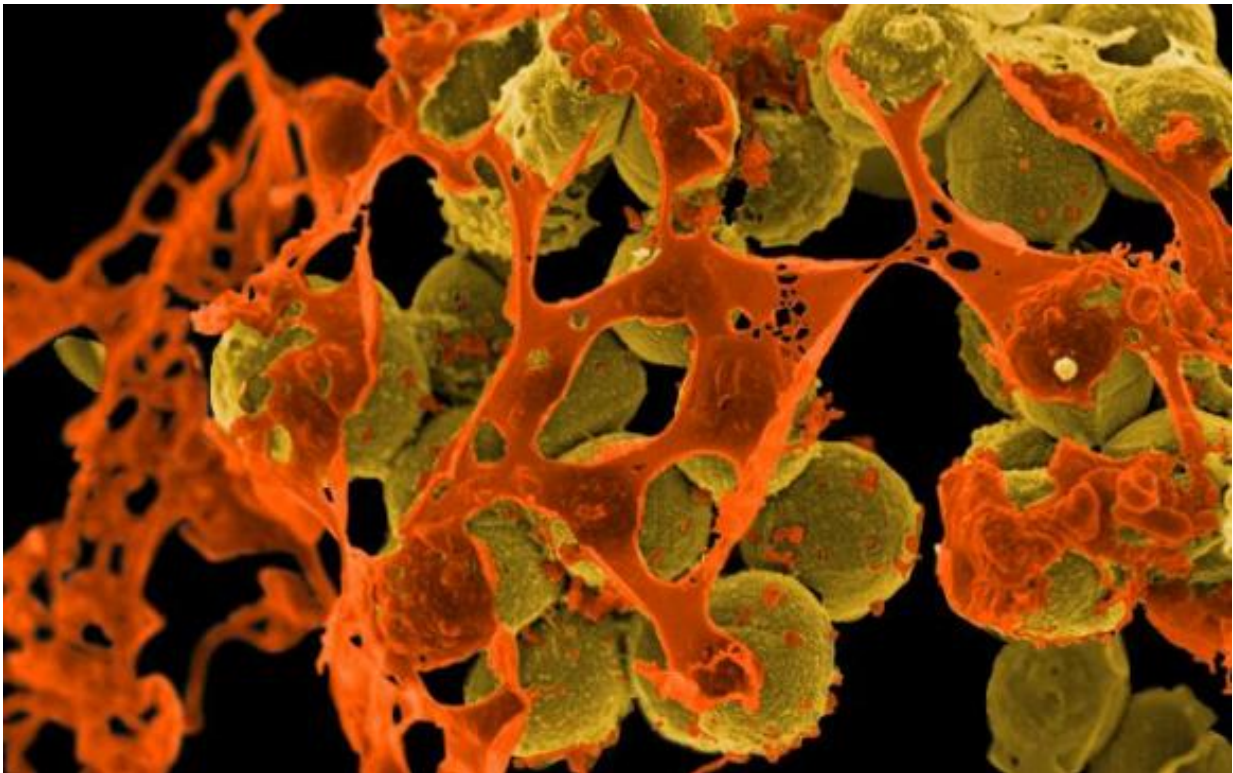


Common hospital soap effective in preventing hospital-acquired infections

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Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*. Credit: NIH/NIAID

Holding hope for a relatively inexpensive way to improve care and prevent the spread of deadly hospital-acquired infections, a new study reports that bathing patients in a common hospital soap, called chlorhexidine, was equally effective in preventing the transmission of

the methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) as the common practice of having healthcare workers avoid physical contact with the patients.

James McKinnell, MD, an infectious disease specialist at Los Angeles Biomedical Research Institute (LA BioMed) presented the findings at the Society for Healthcare Epidemiology of America meeting May 14-17 in Orlando. He said the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) currently recommend "contact precautions," which include wearing gowns and gloves during patient visits, to avoid the spread of MRSA and other diseases in healthcare settings. Patients placed in contact precautions derive no benefit from the programs, but these patients do assume a higher risk of hospital complications.

The new study challenges the practice of using contact precautions to avoid infections and may provide a possible alternative strategy that could improve [patient care](#). Dr. McKinnell's research group found fewer MRSA contamination events when patients were only bathed in chlorhexidine compared to when patients were subject to contact precautions.

"Our research indicated bathing patients may be as effective in preventing disease transmission as the current practice of limiting contact with patients," said Dr. McKinnell. "Further study is needed, but these findings could hold great significance for finding a relatively inexpensive and effective way to prevent the spread of potentially deadly hospital-acquired infections and improve patient care."

He said patients placed in contact precautions spend less time with their doctors and may have a lower quality of care. Unfortunately, he said, contact precautions have become so prevalent that over 15% of hospitalized patients are exposed to the physical isolation and risks associated with limited contact with healthcare workers.

The study of chlorhexidine compared patient transmission and environmental contamination with MRSA in three intensive care units (ICU) over a six-month period. The researchers documented nine MRSA environmental contamination events during the period of time when the hospital ICU staff was using only contact precautions to prevent the spread of disease. The researchers documented fewer MRSA contamination events—seven—during the time when the only precaution taken was bathing the patients in chlorhexidine.

MRSA and other hospital acquired infections are a growing healthcare concern. The CDC reported that on any given day, about one in every 25 [hospital patients](#) has at least one healthcare-associated [infection](#). Its survey found an estimated 722,000 [hospital-acquired infections](#) in U.S acute care hospitals in 2011, the most recent year for which it has data. It also found 75,000 [hospital patients](#) with these infections died during their hospitalizations.

Provided by Los Angeles Biomedical Research Institute at Harbor

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