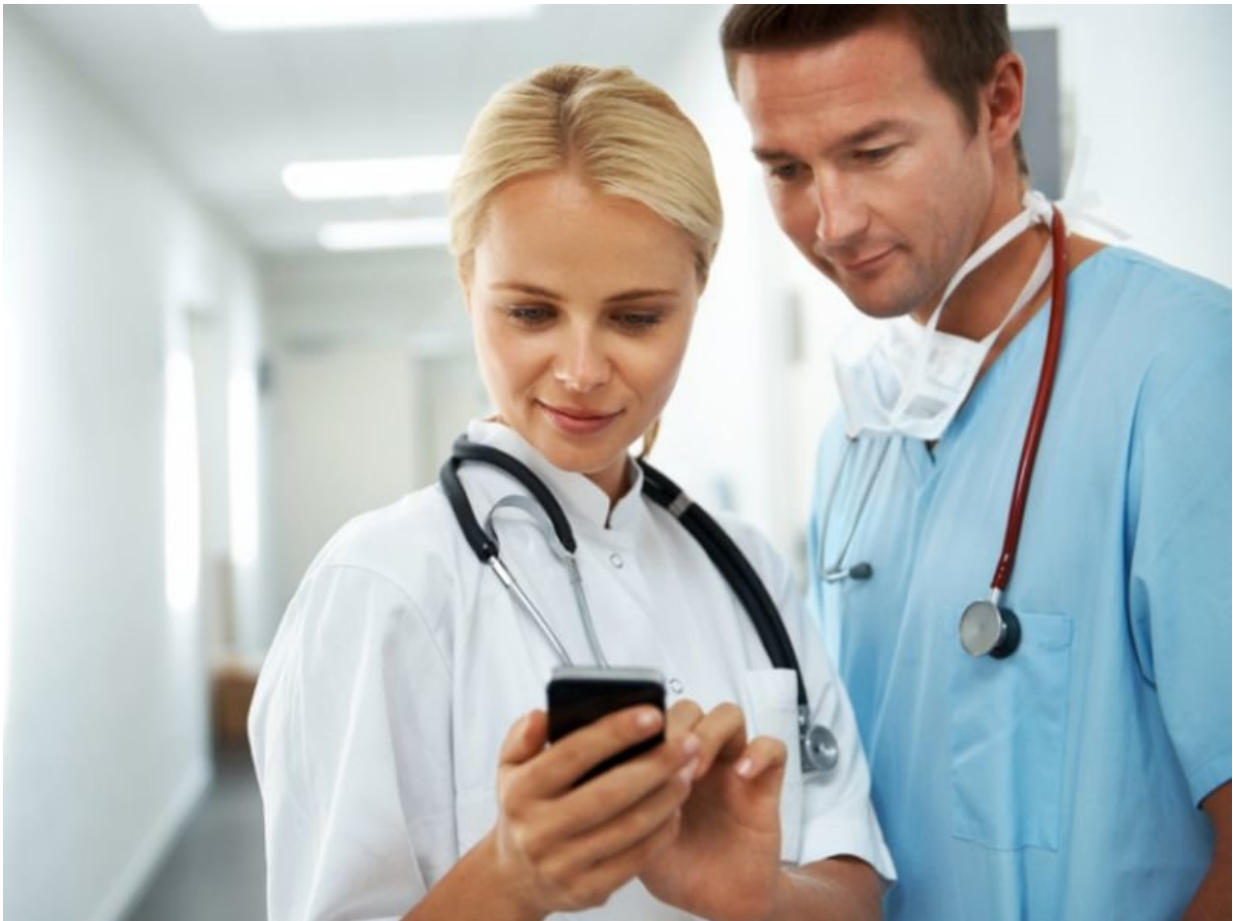


# Docs may have trick up their sleeves fighting germs

October 6 2017

---



(HealthDay)—With antibiotic-resistant "superbugs" continuing to be a

threat in U.S. hospitals, doctors are looking for innovative ways to cut down on disease transmission.

Now, research suggests one solution may be within arm's reach—literally.

Physicians' white coats with sleeves above the elbow were much less likely to have traces of infectious viruses on them than long-sleeved versions, the study found.

"These results provide support for the recommendation that health care personnel wear short sleeves to reduce the risk for pathogen transmission," concluded a team led by Amrita John. She's an infectious disease specialist at University Hospitals Case Medical Center in Cleveland.

According to the team, "physicians' white coats are frequently contaminated, but seldom cleaned."

For that very reason, the United Kingdom already mandates that doctors be "bare below the elbows" as a means of lowering the chance that germs on a dirty coat sleeve will be transmitted to a patient.

But is sleeve length really a factor in the transmission of infections?

To find out, John's group had [health care workers](#) wear either short- or long-sleeved white coats while examining a mannequin with surfaces that had been contaminated with a harmless-but-communicable virus.

The workers then went and examined a second mannequin—replicating normal hospital "rounds" where doctors might visit numerous patients.

The researchers then tested both the sleeves and the wrists of each

worker for a certain "DNA marker" that indicated the presence of the virus.

The result: "contamination with the DNA marker was detected significantly more often on the sleeves and/or wrists when personnel wore long- versus short-sleeved coats," the researchers reported.

In fact, while virus was detected on none of the sleeves or wrists of 20 workers wearing the short-sleeved coats, it was found on one-quarter (five out of 20) of those donning long sleeves.

And in one of those cases, the virus had made its way to the second mannequin—showing how a doctor's sleeve might transmit germs patient-to-patient.

The findings add weight to the recommendation for short-sleeved coats for physicians, the researchers noted.

Dr. Alan Mensch is a pulmonologist and senior vice president of medical affairs at Northwell Health's Syosset Hospital in Syosset, N.Y. Reviewing the findings, he agreed that keeping in-hospital infections to a minimum is crucial.

"Patients come to the hospital to get well, and it is the hospital's duty to accomplish that without causing a new infection," he said.

He called the new findings "intriguing," but said they also raise many questions.

"Though short sleeves may prevent transmission of [viral] DNA, will they decrease infections?" he wondered. And, "Should we advise [health care](#) providers to wash their wrists along with their hands—and will that decrease infection transmission?"

The findings were presented Oct. 4 in San Diego at ID Week, the annual meeting of the Infectious Diseases Society of America. Experts note that findings presented at medical meetings are typically considered preliminary until published in a peer-reviewed journal.

**More information:** Oct. 4, 2017, presentation, ID Week, San Diego; Alan Mensch, M.D., senior vice president, medical affairs, Northwell Health's Plainview and Syosset Hospitals, New York

There's more on protecting yourself from infections in the hospital at the [National Patient Safety Foundation](#).

Copyright © 2017 [HealthDay](#). All rights reserved.

Citation: Docs may have trick up their sleeves fighting germs (2017, October 6) retrieved 17 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2017-10-docs-sleeves-germs.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.