

# Hospital privacy curtains may harbor dangerous germs—new study

September 27 2018

---

Without timely intervention, privacy curtains in hospitals can become breeding grounds for resistant bacteria, posing a threat to patient safety, according to new research published in the *American Journal of Infection Control (AJIC)*, the journal of the Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology (APIC).

The longitudinal, prospective, [pilot study](#) tracked the contamination rate of ten freshly laundered privacy curtains in the Regional Burns/Plastics Unit of the Health Services Center in Winnipeg, Canada. While the curtains had minimal contamination when they were first hung, the curtains that were hung in [patient rooms](#) became increasingly contaminated over time—and by day 14, 87.5 percent of the curtains tested positive for methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA), a pathogen associated with significant morbidity and mortality. In contrast, control curtains that were not placed in patient rooms stayed clean the entire 21 days.

None of the rooms where the curtains were placed were occupied by [patients](#) with MRSA. Four curtains were placed in a four-bed room; four were placed in two double rooms; and two controls were placed in areas without direct patient or caregiver contact. Researchers took samples from areas where people hold curtains, suggesting that the increasing contamination resulted from direct contact.

"We know that privacy curtains pose a high risk for cross-contamination because they are frequently touched but infrequently changed," said

Kevin Shek, BSc, the study's lead author in the article. "The high rate of contamination that we saw by the fourteenth day may represent an opportune time to intervene, either by cleaning or replacing the curtains."

By day 21, almost all curtains exceeded 2.5 CFU/cm, the requirement for food processing equipment cleanliness in some locations, such as the United Kingdom.

"Keeping the patient's environment clean is a critical component in preventing healthcare-associated infections," said 2018 APIC President Janet Haas, Ph.D., RN, CIC, FSHEA, FAPIC. "Because privacy curtains could be a mode of disease transmission, maintaining a schedule of regular cleaning offers another potential way to protect patients from harm while they are in our care."

The study authors acknowledge the small sample size of this pilot study and recommend additional research to understand the clinical consequences of contaminated curtains.

**More information:** Kevin Shek et al, Rate of contamination of hospital privacy curtains in a burns/plastic ward: A longitudinal study, *American Journal of Infection Control* (2018). [DOI: 10.1016/j.ajic.2018.03.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ajic.2018.03.004)

Provided by Elsevier

Citation: Hospital privacy curtains may harbor dangerous germs—new study (2018, September 27) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2018-09-hospital-privacy-curtains-harbor-dangerous.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.