



Department of Health
Agency of Human Services



Unique Vermont Collaborative Works to Prevent Healthcare-Associated Infections

Celebrate health during National Public Health Week: April 3-9

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Media Contact: Communication Office
Vermont Department of Health
802-863-7281

BURLINGTON, VT – Hospital call bells and a TV remote control are “high touch” areas in acute care settings where multidrug-resistant organisms can spread. In a long-term care setting such as a nursing home, a frame holding a family photo, soft furniture or a stuffed animal may be the “high touch” areas of concern in that setting.

Identifying surfaces that should be routinely cleaned is one example of the scrutiny being applied by a statewide MDRO (multidrug-resistant organism) Prevention Collaborative established in September 2010. The ongoing work of the collaborative, unlike any other initiative currently underway nationwide, pairs long-term care facilities and acute care centers to achieve one common goal: prevent healthcare-associated MDRO infections.

“This is a winnable battle,” said State Epidemiologist Patsy Kelso, PhD. “Long-term care facilities and hospitals have patients who go back and forth between these settings all the time, and our collaborative is working to prevent the spread of MDRO infections from one facility to another. They’re communicating better when they transfer a patient, and they’re taking a close look at things like the way they clean patient rooms, and how they use antibiotics. We are getting front-line staff to share ideas, and we are bringing the experience of acute care infection prevention experience into the long-term care setting.”

This effort is in line with a national priority to prevent and control healthcare-associated infections. The Vermont collaborative includes the Health Department, the Vermont Program for Quality in Health Care, every hospital in Vermont, most of the state’s long-term care facilities that provide skilled nursing services, and Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center. The Centers for Disease Control & Prevention provides funding as well as expertise for the collaborative.

Two of the many facilities working closely together to reduce infections are Gifford Medical Center in Randolph and Mayo Healthcare.

“We meet on a regular basis and we have a core team that has approached different components of this issue (healthcare-associated infections), and we are continually reviewing our policies and procedures,” said Thom Goodwin, quality and infection prevention manager for Gifford Medical Center.

The two facilities have made several adjustments and improvements, such as having Gifford Medical Center process laboratory tests for Mayo Healthcare, making it easier to track infections.

“We used to send our lab samples out of state and now we are using Gifford, which translates to better patient care,” said Barbara Connor, RN, director of nursing services. “We have a much stronger relationship now, we have a face and a name, and we can pick up the phone and question anything about a patient and a resident and that is huge. We have cut down barriers and we are reaping even bigger benefits than I anticipated at the beginning.”

For more information on the Vermont collaborative and healthcare-associated infections, visit www.healthvermont.gov.

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Vermont Department of Health | 108 Cherry Street | Burlington, VT 05402
Voice: 802-863-7200 | In Vermont 800-464-4343 | Fax: 802-865-7754 | TTY/TDD: Dial 711 first
Health Care Provider Infectious Disease Reporting: 802-863-7240 or 800-640-4374
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