

Florida Hospital's Quality Goals

1. Rank in the Top 10% of hospitals nationwide
2. Show ongoing cycles of improvement in all areas of patient care

March 2007

Florida Hospital Quality Dashboard

Pneumonia Care	Heart Attack Care	Heart Failure Care	<i>Infection Control</i>	Patient Safety	Whole Person Care
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Hand Washing Prevents Hospital Infections

Nearly two million people acquired infections while patients in US hospitals last year. Their conditions ranged from simple urinary tract to life-threatening pneumonia and bloodstream infections. Hospital-acquired infections cost the American public almost \$5 billion each year – not to mention patient suffering and lost work days.

The risk of picking up a bug (a virus or bacteria) is inherently greater in the hospital setting. Patients are there because they are sick – as are their fellow patients. Seriously ill patients who have already lowered immune systems are especially susceptible. Yet, the US Centers for Disease Control (CDC) estimates that up to a third of hospital-acquired infections are preventable.

Hand washing

Back in the mid-1800s, the medical community had not yet encountered the germ theory of disease. There was an epidemic of childbed fever caused by physicians who delivered babies after performing autopsies – without washing their hands in between.¹

A Viennese physician named Ignaz Semmelweis believed that germs caused disease and that many diseases could be prevented by good sanitation. He set out to educate the medical community about handwashing. But Dr. Semmelweis was shunned by his colleagues and the epidemic worsened. The germ theory wasn't accepted until late that century.

¹ *The Doctors' Plague* by Sherman Nuland, MD

While not going from autopsies to babies, many physicians and nurses today still fail to wash their hands between patients. Busy schedules and chapped hands are commonly cited reasons. But the CDC and other safety organizations all agree that thorough and consistent handwashing prevents the transfer of infectious agents from one patient to another. In fact, handwashing is now included on the list of official safety measures for a number of quality organizations, adding a new level of emphasis for health care providers.

Florida Hospital

CDC hand hygiene guidelines – used at Florida Hospital – include specific handwashing protocols, the use of alcohol-based lotions in lieu of soap and water (under certain conditions), and the warning that wearing gloves does not eliminate the need for thorough handwashing. The CDC also asks health care facilities to develop monitoring policies for the guidelines.

In addition, the National Quality Forum (NQF)² has identified 30 Safe Practices – including handwashing – that are proven to prevent or minimize adverse events. Florida Hospital tracks these 30 Safe Practices and dozens of other quality and safety indicators on a daily basis. Monthly internal Report Cards show if each indicator is at, near or below the hospital's goal. Compliance with handwashing protocols is above goal.

In addition to handwashing, Florida Hospital uses other precautions to prevent the spread of bacteria and viruses. Infection Control professionals actively track patterns and rates of infection. They regularly educate hospital staff and promote evidence-based practices designed to prevent the spread of infection. All staff follow a set of guidelines called Standard Precautions in which they use personal protective equipment such as gloves, gowns and masks to prevent exposure to body fluids or other potentially infectious materials. Patients with known or suspected communicable infections stay in isolation rooms. Signs on the doors of isolation rooms notify staff and patients' visitors of the recommended precautions for safely caring for or visiting the patient. Hazardous waste and needles are safely stored and disposed of according to law.

What Patients Should Do

Some patients are reluctant to ask their doctors or nurses if they have washed their hands, fearing that such a question would be rude. But it's important to remember that these caregivers are there to help, and handwashing helps prevent infections.

If they say they have already washed their hands or that they will be wearing gloves, remind them that safety experts say this isn't enough. They will be touching the gloves when they put them on, or the gloves could have miniscule holes.

The physician or nurse should scrub his or her hands and fingers with hospital-approved soap for at least 15 seconds and use the paper towel to turn off the faucet. Approved alcohol hand rubs or waterless alcohol products may be used when hands are not visibly dirty.

² The NQF is a 215-member organization that has received support from the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) of the federal government.

Patients have roles, too. If you are in the hospital for surgery or any other reason:

- Wash your own hands after using the restroom or when handling any soiled material.
- Be sure to ask friends and family to wash their hands when they visit. Ask them not to visit if they have a cold or any other illness.
- If you are unable to get out of bed on your own, ask your caretakers or visitors to help you wash your hands throughout the day and especially before you eat.
- Most importantly, if you have a question about your condition or healthcare, speak up. Ask questions, let your doctors and nurses know your concerns so they can answer your needs appropriately.

For More Information

For additional information on communicating with physicians and hospital staff about infection prevention, please visit:

Centers for Disease Control: www.cdc.gov/ncidod/hip/training/infctctl.htm

American Hospital Association: www.hospitalconnect.com