

Hospital Infections Kill 12 People An Hour

Hospitals are supposed to be a safe place to go when someone gets sick. However, a recent investigative report in the Chicago Tribune revealed that in 2000, an estimated 103,000 deaths were linked to infections acquired in U.S. hospitals. This makes our hospitals one of the most hostile environments and most dangerous, infectious places on earth. The problem is so widespread that hospital-acquired infections are ranked as the fourth leading cause of death in the United States.

According to Michael J. Berens, Chicago Tribune staff reporter, "A hidden epidemic of life-threatening infections is contaminating America's hospitals, needlessly killing tens of thousands of patients each year." What's more, the article noted, nearly three-quarters of the deadly infections were preventable! This was the result of unsanitary facilities, germ-laden instruments, unwashed hands and other lapses.

The article also quoted Dr. Barry Farr, a leading infection-control expert and president of the Society for Healthcare Epidemiology of America. "The number of people needlessly killed by hospital infections are unbelievable, but the public doesn't know anything about it. For years, we've been bundling the bodies of patients off to the morgue while infection rates get higher and higher."

The report highlighted a 1998 case in Chicago, where several workers tended without washing their hands—even though they were ill. As a result, eight children died of infection. "The flu-like outbreak, which the city of Chicago never revealed to the public, was halted weeks later after three dozen sick healthcare workers were ordered to stay home," the report revealed.

The *Tribune* conducted extensive research for the report, analyzing records gathered among 75 federal and state agencies, as well as internal hospital files, patient databases and court cases around the nation. The result is the first comprehensive analysis of preventable patient deaths linked to infections within 5,810 hospitals nationally, it noted. "Since 1995, more than 75% of all hospitals have been cited for significant cleanliness and sanitation violations," the paper reported.

SOURCE: "Infection epidemic carves deadly path: Poor hygiene, overwhelmed workers contribute to thousands of deaths," by Michael J. Berens, *Chicago Tribune*, Jul 21, 2002 **in Conclusion**