

August 2015 Vital Signs: Making Health Care Safer

We're at a tipping point: an increasing number of germs no longer respond to the drugs designed to kill them. Inappropriate prescribing of antibiotics and lack of infection control can contribute to drug resistance and put patients at risk for deadly diarrhea (caused by *C. difficile*). Even if one facility is following recommended infection controls, germs can be spread inside of and between health care facilities when patients are transferred from one health care facility to another without appropriate actions to stop spread. Lack of coordination between facilities can put patients at increased risk. Now more than ever is the time for public health authorities and health care facilities to work together, sharing experiences and connecting patient safety efforts happening across the state.

Facilities should work together to protect patients:

1. Common Approach (*Not enough*):
 - Patients can be transferred back and forth from facilities for treatment without all the communication and necessary infection control actions in place.
2. Independent Efforts (*Still not enough*):
 - Some facilities work independently to enhance infection control but are not often alerted to antibiotic-resistant or *C. difficile* germs coming from other facilities, or outbreaks in the area.
 - Lack of shared information from other facilities means that necessary infection control actions are not always taken and germs are spread to other patients.
3. Coordinated Approach (*Needed*):
 - Public health departments track and alert health care facilities to antibiotic-resistant or *C. difficile* germs coming from other facilities, and outbreaks in the area.
 - Facilities and public health authorities share information and implement shared infection control actions to stop spread of germs from facility to facility.

What can be done?

- State and local health departments can
 - Identify the health care facilities in the area and how they are connected. Know their infection prevention and antibiotic stewardship activities.
 - Dedicate staff to improve connections and coordination with health care facilities in the area.
 - Work with CDC to use data for action to better prevent infections and improve antibiotic use in health care settings.
 - Know the antibiotic resistance threats in the area and state.
- Health care facilities CEOs/ administrators can:
 - Implement systems to alert receiving facilities when transferring patients who have drug-resistant germs.
 - Review and perfect infection control actions within your facility.
 - Get leadership commitment to start or join HAI/ antibiotic resistance prevention activities in your area.
 - Connect with your public health department to share data about antibiotic resistance and other HAIs.
 - Make sure clinical staff have access to prompt and effective laboratory testing for antibiotic resistant germs.