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Beware the Bath Basins

By Laura DiGiulio — posted 05/05/2009

Studies have found that each year, an estimated 90,000 people die in the United States from hospital-acquired infections (HAIs). In fact, HAIs are ranked as the fifth leading cause of death in acute-care hospitals. While many dedicated environmental-services staffs work hard to disinfect patient rooms and items to prevent the spread of these kinds of diseases, one area that should be particularly monitored are patient bath basins.

Why does this incredible profusion of bacteria flourish in these small basins used to give patients a bed bath? During bathing, friction releases skin flora into bath water, causing the basin to become a cross-contamination “hot zone.” If the person using the bath has an infection, another patient or health-care worker can contract the disease via inhalation, ingestion, or direct contact with skin or contaminated water. In addition, the bath basin itself can become contaminated with gram-negative bacteria, due to the warm, humid bathroom environment.

In January 2009, the *American Journal of Critical Care* published a study titled “Patients’ Bath Basins as Potential Sources of Infection: A Multicenter Sampling Study.” During the study, 92 bath basins located within three acute-care hospitals were evaluated using sterile culture sponges. Alarming results were found. 98 percent of the 92 bath basins grew some sort of bacteria. The organisms with the highest positive rates included enterococci, gram-negative organisms, *Staphylococcus aureus*, vancomycin-resistant enterococci, methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*, *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*, *Candida albicans*, and *Escherichia coli*.

In summary, the study found that “Bath basins are a reservoir for bacteria and may be a source of transmission of hospital-acquired infections. Increased awareness of bath basins as a possible source of transmission of hospital-acquired infections is needed, particularly for high-risk patients.” (Read the [study in full](#).)

Protect & Prevent

So how can this be prevented? The following detailed disinfecting procedure meets both the P-182 Protocol established by NSF International—a nonprofit, nongovernmental organization that develops standards and provides product certification and education in the field of public health and safety—for the proper disinfecting technique for pipeless whirlpool baths, and the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration’s Directive CPL 2-2.69 regarding the protection of health-care workers from the risk of contamination by bloodborne pathogens:

Note: When cleaning a bath, as elsewhere, you should always wear personal protective

equipment, such as gloves and safety goggles. Be sure to wash your hands prior to putting on the gloves.

Equipment you will need: two to three cleaning cloths, a five-quart bucket, and an U.S. Environmental Protection Agency-registered, tuberculocidal disinfectant.

- First, dilute the disinfectant by adding 1/2 ounce per one-gallon water in the five-quart bucket and pour the mixture into the stopped bathroom sink.
- Next, re-fill the bucket using the same dilution rate and place two to three cloths in the filled bucket.
- Drain the tub and disassemble all removable parts within the tub (if any.) Place those parts in the bathroom sink containing the disinfectant and let them soak for 10 minutes.
- Meanwhile, using the cleaning cloths that have soaked in the bucket, wet-clean the inside of the tub. Allow to soak for 10 minutes.
- After the removable parts have been soaking for 10 minutes, return to the bathroom sink and use another clean cloth to remove all visible soil from the removable parts.
- Drain the water from the sink and rinse the removable parts with tap water.
- After the tub has been soaking for 10 minutes, rinse the tub surfaces with tap water, using a hand shower.
- After rinsing, use a clean, dry cloth to dry all surfaces of the tub and the removable parts. Reassemble the removable parts.

By following the above procedure, environmental-services staffs can greatly reduce the risk of cross-contamination and the spread of HAIs.

Laura DiGiulio is editor of Executive Housekeeping Today, the monthly magazine distributed by the International Executive Housekeepers Association.

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