

Helping hands

A SIMPLE HYGIENE STRATEGY HAS BEEN PROVEN TO SUCCESSFULLY REDUCE RATES OF CLINICAL MRSA INFECTION IN HOSPITALS AND, WRITES JUSTINE COSTIGAN, ITS AS EASY AS WASHING YOUR HANDS.

Antibiotic resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA), commonly known as Golden Staph (because of its colour on a laboratory plate) or the ‘superbug’, is usually harmless. Carried on our skin, it can sometimes cause minor infections, but become infected when recovering from surgery or weakened by illness and the results can be extremely serious.

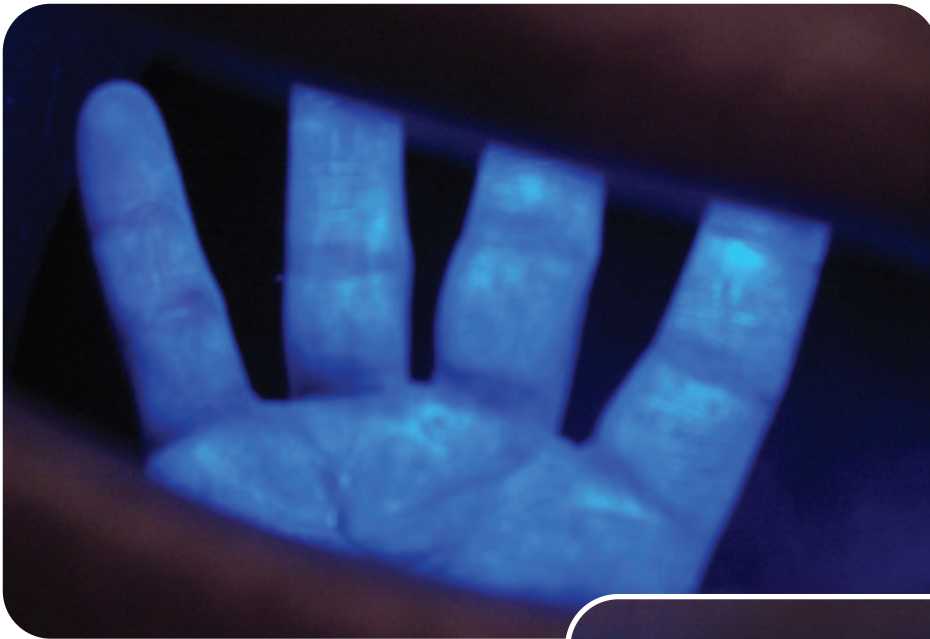
MRSA is easily spread through patient contact, food, respiratory droplets and contaminated instruments and preventing this transfer of infection between patients and staff is the key to reducing rates of infection in hospitals. Staff at Melbourne’s Austin Hospital knew that strategies to reduce infection by following strict hygiene strategies had been successful overseas. Inspired by the work of

Professor Didier Pittet at the University of Geneva Hospital, the Austin’s Infectious Diseases Department Director, Lindsay Grayson, decided to implement a similar strategy in Australia.

With improved hand hygiene at the heart of the 3-year program, staff at the Austin began using an alcohol/chlorhexidene (ACHRS) solution before and after every patient contact. Motivated by an extensive training and education program ‘Operation Clean Start’ was designed to improve handwashing compliance, introduce better cleaning of shared ward equipment and offer MRSA decolonisation to a targeted group of past carriers on readmission.

Did you know?

A 2006 British report suggested Doctors should stop wearing ties and traditional white coats at work because they might be responsible for spreading MRSA. The British Medical Association said ties performed no beneficial function in treating patients and, as they were rarely washed, were a potential bug haven.



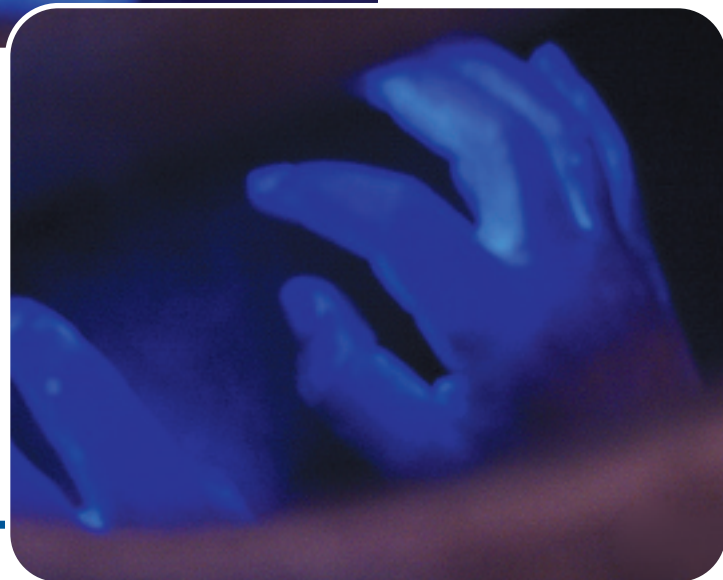
'Illuminating bugs' with Glitterbug at the Blood, Bugs and Bodies exhibit.

ACHRS was placed at the foot of every patient's bed, on catheter and wound dressing trolleys, at nurses' stations and outside patient rooms. Alcohol impregnated wipes were used to clean ward equipment between every use and a database was developed to identify patients with a history of MRSA infection. It was a simple program supported by heavy promotion of the new 'clean culture' through posters, brochures and online. Completion of the DeBug training package became a requirement of employment at the hospital.

Comparing rates of MRSA before and after the implementation of 'Operation Clean Start' clearly showed substantial reduction in rates of MRSA infection throughout the hospital. By vigilantly complying with the hand hygiene program, the risk to patients was significantly lowered.

The cost of running the program in the hospital was estimated at \$180,000 per annum. US figures suggest that each case of MRSA costs a hospital approximately US\$27,000 – so preventing 5-6 patients from developing MRSA makes the program cost neutral, preventing further cases would begin to save hospitals significant amounts of money.

Although the initial 3-year study was completed in 2005, the DeBug program's success has ensured it now has a permanent place at the Austin. Other Victorian hospitals are due to begin implementing the program this year. 🧼



Glitterbug

– revealing the invisible

At *Blood, Bugs and Bodies*, the RCPA's anniversary exhibition held at the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney earlier this year, visitors to the exhibition were able to try a fascinating experiment. By putting their hands under the Glitterbug UV lamp, they could see exactly what was on their skin. Highlighting any dirt or residue, the effect was eerie with the contaminated parts of the skin revealed as a glittery, ultra-violet substance.

Developed by MedTex for use in hospitals, health care facilities and schools among others, the Glitterbug is part of a unique hygiene system that makes sure hands can be thoroughly checked for cleanliness. Using a small amount of potion, hands are washed as normal and then submitted to the UV lamp – any potion residue will show under the light. The Glitterbug can also be used on objects - a powder is applied and then checked using the Glitterbug to make sure they are clean.

As well as having a lot of fun with the Glitterbug, visitors to the exhibition gained an understanding of just how easily germs are transferred.

For more information about the Glitterbug visit medtex.com.au