Today, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention announced that carbapenem-resistant Enterobacteriaceae (CRE) “pose a very serious problem” and that “we need to sound the alarm” against this “nightmare bacteria.” In a briefing for reporters and the healthcare community, CDC Director Thomas Frieden M.D. used these words to underscore the gravity of the threat. He said the window to contain this germ is open but not for long.

According to Frieden, the drug-resistant bacteria have already invaded 200 hospitals. Infections caused by this germ have a morality rate as high as 50%.

These alarming facts and the alarming language used by Dr. Frieden would suggest that the CDC will now advocate for extraordinary measures to stop this germ.

Unfortunately, the CDC’s self-styled “detect and destroy” strategy is insufficient. Arjun Srinivasan, M.D., Associate Director for Healthcare-Associated Infection Prevention Programs, recommended that hospitals start screening or detecting for this germ once they begin to see cases. That’s too late. As the experience at the National Institutes of Health Medical Center in June 2011 demonstrated, once the first carrier enters the hospital, the battle is already half lost. Six patients died at the NIH, including a 16 year old boy. Universal screening would have probably prevented that.

Second, Dr. Srinivasan said that current cleaning methods are sufficient. Wrong again. The NIH researchers reported in Infection Control and Hospital Epidemiology (January 2013) that the outbreak was only stopped once rooms were double cleaned with bleach and then misted with hydrogen peroxide.

Finally, the CDC glossed over the issue most important to patients and families. Anyone planning a hospital stay has a right to know which hospitals have had cases of CRE. The mortality rate is so high, and the speed and uncontrolled nature of the spread so lethal, that no patient should have to go unknowingly into such a perilous environment. Only six states currently make CRE a reportable disease. All 50 should, and hospitals should be required to answer honestly when asked if the germ is present in their facility.

*Betsy McCaughey is Chairman and Founder of the Committee to Reduce Infection Deaths. [www.hospitalinfection.org](http://www.hospitalinfection.org)*