

The New York Times

Curbing Hospital Infections

May 31, 2010

To the Editor:

Re: “New Way Bacterium Spreads in Hospitals” (May 25): Clostridium difficile infections generally start when a patient swallows the germ. It happens because surfaces in the hospital are contaminated with C. diff, which can live for many weeks on tables, bedrails, faucets and curtains. Patients touch the surface, then touch their hands to their lips. Or they pick up food without cleaning their hands, and swallow the germ along with whatever they are eating.

That’s why reminding patients to wash their hands with soap and water frequently is important. Alcohol-based hand cleaners do not kill C. diff. Patients who can’t walk to the bathroom should be helped to clean their hands, especially before meals. Obviously, more rigorous cleaning of hospital surfaces is essential, too.

Betsy McCaughey

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The writer is chairwoman of Committee to Reduce Infection Deaths.