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Wash Your Hands and Save A Patient's Life



Posted by [Catherine Bertram](#), Partner

There is a national epidemic of hospital acquired infections. To combat this situation, the entity that accredits hospital in the United States, the [Joint Commission](#), announced this fall a national plan of attack that includes the very simple act of requiring all members of the hospital health care team to wash their hands between patients. Where do our local hospital's stand on this?

Over the last 30 years, poor hand hygiene has continued to contribute to the high rates of [infections acquired in hospitals](#), clinics and other health care settings. According to a [patient safety report](#) by the [World Health Organization](#), these infections affect as many as 1.7 million patients in the United States each year, racking up an annual cost of \$6.5 billion and contributing to more than 90,000 deaths annually.

According to Dr. Mark Chassin of the [Joint Commission](#), hand-washing failures contribute to infections linked to health care that kill almost 100,000 Americans a year and cost U.S. hospitals \$4 billion to \$29 billion a year to combat. Dr. Chassin's announcement came this fall after Hearst Newspapers published the results of an investigation, "Dead by Mistake," which reported that 247 people die every day in the United States from infections contracted in hospitals.

The Joint Commission's new program, the [Center for Transforming Health Care](#), is funded by hospitals and other large health care entities.

What are our local hospitals in our community doing about this problem? That is the question we need to be asking. What are the infection rates at our local hospitals and ambulatory surgery centers? The public has a right to know this information.

About the author:

[Catherine Bertram](#) is board certified in civil trials and was recently nominated as a 2010 Super Lawyer for Washington, D.C. Ms. Bertram has 20 years of trial [experience](#) and is unique in that she was formerly the Director of Risk Management for Georgetown University Hospital so she brings a wealth of knowledge to her practice including how hospitals should be run and what doctors and nurses can do to protect patients. She is a partner with the firm and devotes [her practice](#) to the representation of patients and families of loved ones who have been injured or lost due to medical errors. Ms. Bertram lectures regularly to lawyers and health care providers, nationally and locally, regarding patient safety, medical negligence and other related issues. She has also recently published a chapter in a medical textbook. She can be reached by email at cbertram@reganfirm.com or by phone 202-822-1875 in her office in Washington, D.C.