



August 14, 2011

Dear Colleagues:

As the nation's prevention agency, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is committed to eliminating preventable infections that occur as a result of medical treatment. Surprisingly, one out of every 20 hospitalized patients in this country acquires a healthcare-associated infection (HAI) while receiving treatment for medical or surgical conditions. These infections can be life threatening and also add to our growing health care costs, accounting for billions of dollars in excess health expenditures each year.

CDC has identified eliminating HAIs as a winnable battle. With additional effort and support for evidence-based, cost-effective strategies that we can implement now, we can have a major impact on our nation's health. We must prevent those infections that we know how to prevent. Several published HAI elimination projects have shown significant reductions – up to 70 percent – an indication that existing prevention recommendations work and that we need to continue building on these successes.

CDC works with partners at the state and federal levels, such as the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), to increase adherence to strategies that will prevent healthcare-associated infections. CDC has funded 51 locally based HAI coordinators and has supported 30 state HAI prevention networks to drive progress toward achieving the goals set forth in the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Action Plan to Eliminate HAIs.

To track infections and monitor the impact of prevention strategies, CDC operates the National Healthcare Safety Network (NHSN). NHSN data are used by health care facilities and states to promote prevention and monitor progress, and have been designated for use by CMS as part of its pay-for-reporting programs.

By leveraging state and local public health efforts to improve accountability and implement recommended HAI prevention strategies, tens of thousands of lives and billions of dollars could be saved. Significant progress toward eliminating healthcare-associated infections has been made in recent years, but there is substantial room for further improvement. Thank you for your continued dedication and commitment to fighting HAIs.

Sincerely,

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