

Gateway ref: 14720

Chief Executives of Strategic Health Authorities
Chief Executives of NHS Trusts
Chief Executives of NHS Foundation Trusts
Medical Directors of NHS Trusts
Directors of Nursing
Regional Directors of Public Health
Chairs of Infection Control Committees
Consultants in Communicable Disease Control
Directors of Estates
Directors of Facilities
Monitor

27 August 2010

From:

*The Director of Health
Protection
Department of Health
Room 519
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*The Director of Estates &
Facilities
Department of Health
Room 3N11
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Dear Colleague

Water Sources and Potential for Infection from Taps and Sinks

The Department of Health for England has become aware of a number of reports emanating from English NHS Trusts and in addition information provided by Public Health Wales on two incidents concerning outbreaks of infection with pseudomonads.

These incidents have occurred in augmented care wards (eg high dependency, adult & neonatal critical care, renal and burns units). Hand washing facilities have been identified as the source. There is evidence of persistent colonisation of the faucets and both human and environmental strains have been involved.

It is important for all NHS Trusts and their infection control teams to assess the risk to their patients and where appropriate establish if the water used in hand washing has an unacceptable bacterial count.

This problem is being investigated by the Department of Health and it is necessary for NHS Trusts to take action in the interim. Hand washing facilities should:

1. only be used for the purpose of hand washing;
2. NOT be used for disposal of any body fluids; and

3. be cleaned in a manner that minimises the contamination of the faucet from organisms in the sink trap (via plug hole or overflow).

It is important that where contamination of faucets exists in an augmented care ward that further precautions to protect the patient may be necessary, such as the:

1. use of alcohol hand rubs after washing and scrupulous drying of hands;
or
2. installation of point of use (faucet/terminal end) filters.

It is important that estates and facilities managers review current site engineering and cleaning protocols and establish that they are in accordance with current guidance and also HTM 04-01 *The control of Legionella, hygiene, "safe" hot water, cold water and drinking water systems** and that manufacturers' instructions with regard to installation and maintenance have been followed.

In addition to these actions, could Chief Executives of NHS Trusts please ensure that they share this letter with Directors of Infection and Prevention Control and the person with responsibility for the safe operation of the water distribution systems within the Trust. If this is not the Responsible Person (Water) - as determined in HTM 04-01 Part B Chapter 6 paragraph 6.5 please ensure that they are also made aware of this letter.

Yours sincerely



Ms Clara Swinson
Director of Health Protection



Professor Rob Smith
Director of Estates & Facilities

* (<https://publications.spaceforhealth.nhs.uk/>)