

# Microbial contamination of hospital bed handsets

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**Background:** Hospital bed handsets, including nurse call equipment and television controls, have been found to contain biologic material and may be contaminated with microbes.

**Objective:** The aim of this study was to assess the microbial contamination of hospital bed handsets.

**Methods:** Hospital bed handsets were removed from 115 randomly chosen rooms in a suburban hospital. The handsets were transported to the laboratory in a sterile fashion and opened using a sterile technique, and cultures were obtained from both the anterior and posterior surfaces of the units.

**Results:** The cultures of 12 units (10.4%) revealed no microorganisms. One hundred three units (89.6%) had cultures that grew microorganisms. Of the handsets that were found to contain microorganisms, 48 units (46.6%) had only 1 microorganism, and 55 units (53.4%) had multiple organisms, including 33 units (32.0%) with 2 microorganisms, 21 units (20.4%) with 3 microorganisms, and 1 unit (1.0%) with 4 microorganisms. The microorganisms identified included 90 isolates (87.4%) of coagulase-negative staphylococcus, 51 isolates (49.5%) of bacillus species, 13 isolates (12.6%) of fungal species, 8 isolates (7.8%) of nonhemolytic streptococcus species, 7 isolates (6.8%) of  $\alpha$ -hemolytic streptococcus species, 1 isolate (1.0%) of *Staphylococcus aureus*, and 1 isolate (1.0%) of methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*.

**Conclusion:** Hospital bed handsets were found to have a high incidence of contamination with bacteria and fungus and were found to contain organisms that are known to be the etiologic agents in nosocomial infections. Because of the frequency and duration of contact between hospital patients and hospital bed handsets, existing infection control measures should be studied that could reduce the level of contamination of such handsets or that could isolate the handsets from the patient. (Am J Infect Control 2005;33:170-4.)