

# Cleaner hands make healthcare healthier

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One of the simplest and most effective health measures that can prevent illnesses from spreading is basic hygiene, such as handwashing. Hand hygiene prevents the spread of germs and bacteria through person-to-

person contact but also keeps them off items like door handles and phones that are often touched.

In [clinical settings](#) and hospitals, handwashing is vital to ensure both [patients](#) and [staff](#) reduce the spread of healthcare-associated infections, which affect one out of every 25 hospitalized patients.

"Hand [hygiene](#) is such an important aspect of controlling the spread of infections in healthcare settings, yet compliance has been found to be below 50 percent among [hospital staff](#)," said Adriana Jimenez, Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Epidemiology at Stempel College, who co-authored a paper with Yanet Manresa, Master of Public Health, '19 from Stempel College. "We also noticed that few studies addressed the role of patient hand hygiene and hypothesized that improving the availability and access to hand sanitizing wipes by the patients' bedside would increase compliance with patient hand hygiene."

The study, which was part of quality improvement initiatives, was conducted at two hospitals in Miami.

While both facilities have wall attached hand sanitizer dispensers at the entrance and inside of each room, the researchers wanted to understand if education or access would be more effective. In one hospital, the researchers provided additional education to nursing staff about the importance of hand hygiene, which was relayed to patients. The other hospital did not increase education but, instead, offered alcohol-based wipes on a daily base at the patients' bedsides with additional wipes available on demand.

"Our study found that staff education was key to increasing the percentage of patients reporting that they had been educated or encouraged to keep their hands clean, but easier access was vital to the campaign," Manresa said.

In total 230 patients were interviewed about their [hand hygiene](#) practices and 120 nursing staff members were educated in both facilities.

"Next steps are to implement a combination of both approaches, providing the staff a better understanding of the importance to educate patients while providing patients with the necessary supplies so they can perform [hand](#) sanitization at their bedside before each meal, after toileting, or whenever necessary," Jimenez concluded.

This study was published in the *American Journal of Infection Control*.

**More information:** Yanet Manresa et al. Improving patients' hand hygiene in the acute care setting: Is staff education enough?, *American Journal of Infection Control* (2020). [DOI: 10.1016/j.ajic.2019.12.007](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ajic.2019.12.007)

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