



Common Questions About Hospital-Acquired Infection Rates

At William Osler Health Centre, the health and safety of patients and staff is our first priority and we take the prevention of infectious diseases very seriously. We wish to let the community know that the risk is low for those coming to the hospital for procedures and treatments.

What are hospital-acquired infections?

Sometimes when patients are admitted to the hospital, they can get infections. These are called hospital-acquired infections. In the case of *C. difficile*, this may mean that symptoms began 72 hours after admission to the hospital; or that the infection was present at the time of admission but was related to a previous admission to that hospital within the last four weeks.

What exactly will all hospitals report on September 26th?

On the last day of each month, beginning September 26, 2008, all Ontario hospitals will be required to publicly report on their own websites:

- The number of new hospital-acquired *C. difficile* cases associated with the reporting facility (count) separately for each hospital site.
- Rates of new hospital-acquired *C. difficile* cases associated with the reporting facility, separately for each hospital site.

The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care will also report the same information on its own website at www.ontario.ca/patientsafety/.

How is the *C. difficile* rate calculated:

The *C. difficile* infection rate is calculated as a rate per 1,000 patient days. The “total patient days” represents the sum of the number of days during which services were provided to all inpatients during the given time period.

The rate is calculated as follows:

$$\frac{\text{Number of new hospital acquired cases of } C. \text{ difficile in our facility} \times 1000}{\text{Total number of patient days (for one month)}}$$

How frequently will hospitals report on *C. difficile*?

Monthly. New information will be posted on our website (www.williamoslerhc.on.ca) and on the Ministry’s own website, on the last day of every month, beginning September 26, 2008.

Why will you not be reporting on deaths caused by *C. difficile*?

This is a very complex clinical issue and, we understand, one that Dr. Michael Baker (Expert Lead – Patient Safety with the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care) will be looking at in the time ahead. Defining whether *C. difficile* caused or contributed to a death is a complicated procedure and one that relies on individual judgement. Until standardized reporting criteria are in place, WOHC will follow the lead of the Province and not release these numbers with so much uncertainty at play.

Does WOHC have a *C. difficile* outbreak currently?

No.

How should the numbers be used?

The public reporting of hospital-acquired infection rates is not intended to serve as a measure for hospitals to compare themselves against other organizations, or for the public to use as a measure of where to seek care.

Some hospitals may experience higher rates of infections due to their type (i.e. acute care) and patient population (i.e. elderly). A high number of cases in a one-month period does not necessarily mean that a hospital is “unsafe”; a lower number of cases in a one-month period does not necessarily mean that a hospital is “safe”. That is why it is vital that infection rates be viewed in the context of other performance indicators.

That said, the tracking and analyzing our infection rates over time will provide us with helpful information that we can use to make quality improvements in our organization.

Why are hospitals now required to report these rates?

Rates of *C. difficile* are the first of eight patient safety indicators that hospitals will be required to publicly report. All of these indicators will be posted on William Osler Health Centre’s website and on the Ministry of Health and Long-Term website (www.health.gov.on.ca/patient_safety/).

The reporting of these rates is not the overall solution to reducing the rates of healthcare-associated infections. They are tools which will provide WOHC and other hospitals with good information to assist in understanding where patient safety issues exist and help organizations take action to improve their safety standards.

The public reporting builds on other initiatives such as Just Clean Your Hands – a hand hygiene program for all Ontario hospitals that was launched in March 2008 and the creation of 14 Regional Infection Control Networks across the province.

In the months ahead, hospitals will also be required to report on a variety of other patient safety indicators, including Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) and Vancomycin-resistant Enterococci (VRE).

Who do I call about infection rates at William Osler Health Centre?

Please contact the Corporate Manager, Infection Prevention and Control at (416 or 905) 494-2120 Ext. 33372 if you have any questions about WOHC’s hospital’s infection rates or the infection prevention and control program.