



STURDY

Shedding Light on Sanitation

By Michael Bergman, MD, Sturdy Memorial Hospital

Fighting germs is a never-ending battle. Bacteria, viruses, and other types of germs can exist right under our noses—literally and figuratively—without us being able to see them. On public surfaces like doorknobs, kitchen counters, garbage cans, and toilets, and even on our own hands, they can dwell, invisibly, and spread illness from person to person.

In the health care setting, where patient safety is of utmost importance, staff regularly clean (remove dirt and impurities) and disinfect (kill germs) to prevent the spread of illness and protect patients from hospital-acquired infections.

At Sturdy Memorial Hospital, we recently added a new, high-tech layer to the war against germs and infections: a robot that uses a pulsing ultraviolet (UV) light to destroy harmful bacteria, viruses, fungi, and bacterial spores.

Xenex, the brand name of the robot, is a portable room disinfection system effective at destroying even the most dangerous pathogens, including *Clostridium difficile* (C. diff), norovirus, influenza, and staph bacteria, before they pose a threat to patients.

Although Sturdy staff will continue to manually clean each room on a regular basis, the robot will be used as a supplemental patient safety measure to enhance our sanitation practices. The device, quick enough to disinfect a room in minutes, is being used around the clock at Sturdy in all operating rooms and in equipment rooms, patient rooms, and other areas. We plan to acquire an additional machine in upcoming months.

Currently, this space-age-looking technology is zapping away germs at nearly 200 hospitals nationwide. But what about other areas, like household, workplace, child care, or school settings? For domestic and public areas, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends using soap or detergent and water to clean visible dirt and impurities from surfaces or objects, followed by either a disinfectant registered by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) or, if unavailable, a fresh chlorine bleach-and-water solution. Paying close attention to warnings and directions on product labels is important for usage safety.

In addition to regularly cleaning and disinfecting surfaces, people inside and outside the hospital should regularly wash their hands to prevent the spread of illness. December, which is Hand Washing Awareness Month, is a perfect time to remind each other of the importance of proper hand hygiene so we can protect ourselves from these illness-causing germs and stay healthy. According to the CDC, hand washing is one of the most effective ways to prevent the spread of many types of infection and illness.

Here's the proper way to wash hands:

- Wet hands under clean running water
- Apply soap
- Rub hands together for at least 20 seconds
- Scrub between fingers, under nails, and the backs of hands
- Rinse and then dry with a clean towel

Hands should be washed in such instances as: before, during, and after preparing or eating food; after using the toilet; after touching garbage; after caring for someone who is sick; and after coughing or sneezing. If soap and water are not available, the next-best thing is alcohol-based sanitizer, which can quickly reduce the number of germs on hands but do not eliminate all types of germs.

In light of flu season, it's especially important for all of us to do everything we can to kill germs and prevent illness, whether it's in the hospital, in public, or at home—by using germ-killing rays, cleaning products, or soap and water.

For more information on stopping the spread of germs, visit the CDC's website at www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/stopgerms.htm or Sturdy's website at www.sturdymemorial.org.

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