



Curious About Germs On Hospital Scrubs

By: By Kate Merrill
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Massachusetts is rich in hospitals, and any time you're near one, you'll see hospital employees walking to and from work wearing scrubs or lab coats. It's what might be on that clothing that makes Andy from Arlington curious, and nervous.

He wants to know: "With hospital superbugs apparently on the rise should I be concerned from a public health standpoint?" We found that there's a big debate going on about just that.

You don't have to look hard to find hospital employees walking around wearing scrubs. You'll even see them at restaurant counters and tables. Since many hospital employees come into direct contact with patients, some people are concerned that the scrubs and lab coats they wear can be contaminated with bacteria and germs.

"It's a danger for patients and for the public," says Betsy McCaughey, Ph.D., the head of the non-profit Committee to Reduce Infection Deaths in New York. She sees two problems. "One is that they're spreading bacteria from patient to patient within the hospital and they're also allowing hospital superbugs to escape," she says.

We checked with five of Boston's biggest hospitals and found strict clothing rules for people who work in operating rooms and other sterile environments. They must use freshly

laundered scrubs and they can't wear them out of the OR. However, most other employees can do what they want, and wear the hospital type clothing in and out, to and from work. In those cases, hospitals look at scrubs as "street clothes," and employees are responsible for keeping them clean.

"I don't think there is a major public health issue or concern," says Dr. David Hooper, the chief of infection control at Mass General Hospital. He says the main focus is on hand hygiene since that's where most contact takes place.

"We really consider it extremely important. We track that very carefully. We're in the high 95% range for a number of years now," says Dr. Hooper. And if there's a risk that clothing could be contaminated, the employee must take action. "Then extra gowns are worn that are then taken off and discarded," he says.

But critics say that's not enough. "The solution is that hospitals should be providing laundered attire for hospital personnel," say McCaughey. While some hospitals in other parts of the country are doing that, others say research isn't showing a clear problem. For example the American Medical Association recently studied possible clothing contamination, but told us the findings were "inconclusive." The AMA says the issue needs more research.

[Click here to read the article on CBS Boston](#)

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