

From: JCAHO@jcprdls1.jcaho.org  
Reply-To: JCAHO@jcprdls1.jcaho.org  
Date: Fri, 14 Nov 2003 11:10:19 -0600  
**Subject: JCAHO Approves Strengthened Infection Control Standards**

Media contact:  
Charlene D. Hill  
Media Relations Manager  
630.792.5175  
E-mail: [chill@jcaho.org](mailto:chill@jcaho.org)

(Oakbrook Terrace, Ill. November 14, 2003)

The Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) approved revised standards to help prevent the occurrence of deadly health care-associated infections.

The standards retain many of the concepts embodied in existing standards, but sharpen and raise expectations of organization leadership and of the infection control program itself. The requirements for ambulatory care, behavioral health care, home care, hospital, laboratory and long term care organizations will take effect January 2005.

Health care associated infections constitute a significant safety risk for individuals receiving care in a variety of settings. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that two million individuals acquire an infection each year while being treated in hospitals for other illnesses or injuries, and that 90,000 people die as a result. The Joint Commission accredits more than 16,000 health care organizations, and health care-associated infections are a risk in all of the care settings encompassed in this group.

The revised standards are the result of the work of an expert group of infection-control practitioners, hospital epidemiologists, physicians, nurses, risk managers and other health care professionals, along with significant input from accredited organizations participating in a field review. Since the work of these groups began, two new issues emerging antimicrobial resistance and the management of epidemics and emerging pathogens have been identified. Requirements addressing those topics will be sent to all accredited organizations next month for field review.

The revised standards are designed to raise awareness that health care associated infections are a national concern that can be acquired within any care, treatment or service setting, and transferred between settings, or brought in from the community. Therefore, prevention represents one of the major safety initiatives that a health care organization can undertake. The revised standards focus on the development and implementation of plans to prevent and control infections, with organizations expected to:

- incorporate an infection control program as a major component of safety and performance improvement programs;
- perform an ongoing assessment to identify its risks for the acquisition and transmission of infectious agents;

- effectively use an epidemiological approach which includes conducting surveillance, collecting data, and interpreting the data;
- effectively implement infection prevention and control processes;
- educate and collaborate with leaders across the organization to
- effectively participate in the design and implementation of the infection control program.

The Joint Commission has long worked with experts in infection control to set and maintain state-of-the-art standards. The current infection control standards help accredited hospitals to identify and reduce the risks of acquiring and transmitting infections among patients, employees, physicians and visitors. The standards cover both direct patient care activities and those used to support patient care. The Joint Commission also requires accredited health care organizations to work with local, state and federal agencies to prevent, monitor and control infections.

In addition to evaluating compliance with infection control standards during triennial surveys, the Joint Commission has included infection control as a special focus area during random, unannounced surveys for hospitals in 2003. The Joint Commission also made the CDC's recently updated handwashing guidelines a 2004 National Patient Safety Goal for all accredited organizations in an effort to bring further attention to infection control issues. Furthermore, the Joint Commission has advised accredited organizations that health care-associated infections resulting in death or serious injury should also be voluntarily reported to the Sentinel Event database. The 2004 National Patient Safety Goals require organizations to manage as sentinel events all health care-associated infections that result in death or major permanent loss of function.