MEDIA RELEASE - 5 MAY 2009

NATIONAL HAND HYGIENE PROGRAM AIMS TO HALVE HOSPITAL SUPERBUG INFECTIONS

A new world-first national hand hygiene program is being rolled out across Australian hospitals in a bid to halve the rate of antibiotic-resistant 'superbug' patient infections.

The National Hand Hygiene Initiative is based on groundbreaking Australian research\(^1\) that shows using alcohol-based hand rub is the single most effective intervention in controlling \textit{Staphylococcus aureus} blood stream infections (SAB), including the Methicillin-resistant \textit{Staphylococcus aureus} (MRSA) or 'golden staph' disease.

This is a world-first, step-by-step program to improve hand hygiene in hospitals and other health services and to monitor hand hygiene compliance among healthcare workers. If healthcare workers use alcohol-based hand rub before and after contact with patients in the prescribed way, the rate of \textit{Staphylococcus aureus} infections is expected to halve.

The Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care has instigated, and is funding, the Initiative.

"This is a very exciting development in the fight against patient infection and represents a simple but highly effective program to improve hand hygiene in every public and private hospital in Australia," says Professor Chris Baggoley, Chief Executive of Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care.

"By improving infection control, the Initiative has the potential to save the lives of more than 1,500 Australians a year – a figure similar to the national road toll," Professor Baggoley says.

The National Hand Hygiene Initiative officially begins today, 5 May, to coincide with the World Health Organization’s \textit{Save Lives: Clean your Hands} day.

"MRSA or ‘golden staph’ disease is a major problem for hospitals worldwide. We need to make infection control everyone’s business in the health system and the wider community to help address this problem," says Professor Baggoley.

Australia’s National Hand Hygiene Initiative is being implemented by Hand Hygiene Australia. The Director of Hand Hygiene Australia, Professor Lindsay Grayson, is also Director of Infectious Diseases at Austin Health in Victoria. He undertook the ground-breaking, award winning, research featured last year in the \textit{Medical Journal of Australia} that demonstrates the effectiveness of alcohol-based hand rub in reducing blood stream infections.

"The research demonstrates that where health professionals consistently use an alcohol-based hand rub for just 15 seconds, the rates of golden staph infections are half those in hospitals where health professionals are required to wash their hands for one minute using traditional soap and water,” says Professor Grayson, who is also Australia’s World Health Organization hand hygiene representative.

Media contact: Amy Winter, Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care on 02 9263 3605 or amy.winter@safetyandquality.gov.au
“It is the first time an initiative has been shown to work across multiple sites, across an entire health system in a sustained way, over many years.”

The Initiative has the strong support of the Commonwealth Minister for Health and all State and Territory Health Ministers, which fund the Commission.

Hand Hygiene Australia will work closely with existing State/Territory strategies and campaigns to maximise the success of the Initiative. While initially focusing on acute-care hospitals, Hand Hygiene Australia resources will also be available for all public and private healthcare facilities.

The program represents clear, national guidelines for hand hygiene. It includes an online education program to inform all healthcare workers about infection control and hand hygiene, and will push for all Australian medical and nursing curricula to include training on the importance of effective hand hygiene.

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Media contacts:
Interviews and/or photo opportunities are available with:
• Professor Chris Baggoley, Chief Executive of Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care
• Professor Lindsay Grayson, Director of Hand Hygiene Australia

To arrange an interview or photo, contact Amy Winter, Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care on 02 9263 3605 or amy.winter@safetyandquality.gov.au

About the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care
The Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care is funded by and reports directly to all Australia’s Health Ministers. It works closely with all States and Territories, public and private hospitals, and primary care providers. The Commission leads and coordinates improvement in safety and quality in health care in Australia by identifying issues and policy directions, recommending priorities for action disseminating knowledge, and advocating for safety and quality.

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