Summary brief

Gaps on hand hygiene implementation in 13 public hospitals in Sierra Leone
doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19073787

Key Messages

- Hand Hygiene practice and promotion in public hospitals of Sierra Leone are suboptimal
- Improving hand hygiene will prevent the spread of infections in hospitals in Sierra Leone.
- We must act now to prioritize hand hygiene activities in order to prevent the spread of infections in our hospitals

What is the problem and why is it important?

- We are losing people because they acquire infections in the very places they should be healed.
- When people acquire these infections, they stay longer in hospitals and incur more costs to service their care
- Suboptimal hand hygiene practices are the major reason for all this
- Despite this, there was no previous assessment of the hand hygiene framework in Sierra Leone
- Therefore, information on hand hygiene is needed to guide strategies to prevent the spread of infections in health facilities.

How did we measure it?

- We assessed hand hygiene practices across 13 public hospitals of the Western Area of Sierra Leone
- In May 2021
- Using a World Health Organization (WHO) observational tool
- To collect information from the Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) focal persons
None of the hospitals had a dedicated hand hygiene budget, realistic plan to improve hand hygiene infrastructure or systematic audit of the presence of hand hygiene resources.

Regular ward audits of hand hygiene resources were conducted at only two hospitals.

A formalized patient engagement program was available in only three hospitals.

Implications

Our result shows that we can do something to prevent unnecessary deaths and excess costs incurred by patients in our hospitals if we improve hand hygiene practices.

If we fail to act now, we will disturb the implementation of hand hygiene activities and will not be able to properly manage our hand hygiene resources.

Recommendations:

I. In the short term - we need to put systems in place to engage all stakeholders to prioritise hand hygiene.

II. In the long term - we need to have a costed plan with the required resources set aside to support:

- The establishment of a formalized patient engagement system.
- The introduction of an audit system for hand hygiene resources in hospitals of Sierra Leone.