

Hospital Workers Spread 'Superbugs' By Cell Phone  
A study released on Friday showed that cell phones belonging to hospital workers are covered in bacteria including the 'superbug', MRSA, the AFP reported.

Experts fear it could become a serious source of hospital-acquired infections.

After testing the phones and hands of 200 doctors and nurses working in hospital operating rooms and intensive care units, researchers from the Ondokuz Mayıs University in Turkey found that some 95 percent of cell phones were contaminated with at least one type of bacteria.



The report, published in BioMed Central's Annals of Clinical Microbiology and Antimicrobials, showed that many of the hospital workers had a strong potential to cause illness ranging from minor skin irritations to deadly disease due to cross-contamination.

Researchers, led by Fatma Ulger, found that almost 35 percent of workers carried two types of bacteria, and more than 11 percent carried three or more different species of bugs.

The study noted that only a small sample (10 percent) of staff regularly cleaned their phones, even though they washed their hands.

An astounding one out of every eight cell phones showed traces of methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA), a virulent strain that has claimed the lives of numerous hospital patients throughout the world.

The authors warned that mobile phones could act as a reservoir of infection, facilitating patient-to-patient transmission of bacteria in medical environments.

Though harmless to most healthy people, drug-resistant bacteria can often be lethal for hospital patients in weakened conditions. The bacteria can cause pneumonia or bloodstream infection by making its way into open wounds through catheters or ventilator tubes.

The study, however, was based on a small sampling and the authors acknowledge that more research was needed to confirm their findings.

The report strongly recommended frequent cleaning of phones with alcohol-based disinfectants as well as continuous use of anti-microbial materials.

It concluded that banning cell phone use in hospital settings is probably not practical because the devices are often used for work in emergencies.

Statistics show that MRSA is the cause of more than 60 percent of all hospital infections in the United States. In 2005, MRSA infected 94,000 people and killed 19,000 in the U.S. alone, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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On the Net:

- [Ondokuz Mayıs University](#)
- [Annals of Clinical Microbiology and Antimicrobials](#)