

Three Fresno hospitals targeted by the state for help to reduce high infection rates

By Barbara Anderson



C. difficile is a common hospital infection that causes diarrhea.

CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION

- *Three Fresno hospitals are among 112 in California with high infection rates.*
- *A nasty bug that causes diarrhea is causing more infections in hospitals statewide.*
- *More hospital employees got flu shots in 2013-14.*

Three Fresno hospitals have too many patient infections and have been targeted for help by state public health officials.

Kaiser Permanente Medical Center-Fresno, Community Regional Medical Center and Saint Agnes Medical Center had significantly high health-care associated infection rates, according to a [California Department of Public Health report](#) released Friday.

The Fresno hospitals are among 112 statewide with high infection rates, according to the state.

In 2013, 424 acute-care hospitals in California reported 18,780 infections. By law, hospitals must report cases of *Clostridium difficile*, a common cause of diarrhea in hospital settings, and two drug-resistant infections — methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* and vancomycin-resistant *Enterococci*. Hospitals also must report infections that occur at surgery sites and central line bloodstream infections, which result when a tube is passed into a vein.

The state said hospitals overall have shown progress in reducing infections with the exception of *C. difficile* infections, which increased 5% since 2011.

The report listed 61 hospitals that had fewer infections from 2012 to 2013, including Community Regional, which reduced infections associated with hip surgery. The hospital reported 12 infections in 2012 and only one in 2013.

Kaweah Delta Medical Center in Visalia also reduced its central line bloodstream infections from 15 in 2012 to one in 2013.

Community Regional, however, had above-average rates of central line bloodstream infections on its oncology floor, medical/surgical, medical ward and adult-step down unit, according to the state.

Dr. Thomas Utecht, chief medical and quality officer, said Community has been working to cut infection rates in all areas. To help decrease central line-associated bloodstream infections, the hospital established a prevention team in 2014, he said in an email statement. “Based upon best practices for decreasing infections, the team has successfully implemented new guidelines throughout the hospital,” he said. “Additional education, training and monitoring are ongoing for prevention as well.”

Saint Agnes had higher central-line infection rates on its medical ward. Hospital spokeswoman Kelley Sanchez said the hospital has adopted new specific strategies for reducing central-line infections. The hospital is a member of Health Service Advisory Group, a quality improvement organization. Members of the group visited Saint Agnes in January and again in February and provided advice to the hospital, Sanchez said.

Kaiser-Fresno had higher than average *C. difficile* infection rates. In 2012, it had 12 infections and in 2013 it had 33.

According to the state report, *C. difficile* infections have increased over the past several years due to an emergence of more infectious and virulent strains. Infection control includes hand washing, cleaning hospital rooms and appropriate use of antibiotics, the report said.

Dr. Harold Lin, chief of infectious diseases at Kaiser-Fresno, said in an email statement that the hospital is working to reduce the infections. Lin said the efforts include “meticulous attention to the cleaning of medical devices, standardized protocols for cleaning/disinfecting isolation rooms and daily cleaning and disinfection of all high-touch surfaces in all rooms, along with a robust hand hygiene program.”

On Friday, the Department of Public Health also released [vaccination rates for hospital employees](#). In 2013-14, 85% of hospitals in California had more than 60% of their employees vaccinated for influenza. In 2012-13 only 71% of hospital employees got flu shots.

In the central San Joaquin Valley, all but one of the acute-care hospitals in Fresno County had more than 60% of employees vaccinated. The Reedley hospital, operated by Adventist Health Systems, showed 51.8% of its employees

were vaccinated.

Adventist hospitals in Hanford and Selma showed a combined vaccination rate of 67.3%. Hospital spokeswoman Amanda Jaurigui said the hospital system was not pleased with the vaccination rates and changed policy in 2013-14 to require employees, volunteers and vendors to receive flu shots or wear masks in patient care areas.

“This season, our rates improved dramatically,” Jaurigui said. “More than 86% of our employees networkwide were vaccinated, and the remaining are wearing masks in patient care areas.”

In September, Dr. Kenneth Bird, Fresno County’s health officer, ordered all hospital employees in the county to get flu shots or wear masks. Bird said Friday he hasn’t seen the latest vaccination rates for 2014-15 but expects the rates will be higher than those reported for the prior flu season.

Contact Barbara Anderson: banderson@fresnobee.com, (559) 441-6310 or [@beehealthwriter](https://twitter.com/beehealthwriter) on Twitter.