Hospital Linens Are Testing Positive For Mold

A study published in *Clinical Infectious Diseases* examined freshly- laundered hospital linens, and found that more than 10 percent of sheets received by a fifth of hospitals studied tested positive for *Mucorales*, a fungus responsible for potentially serious infections. Cases of healthcare-associated mucormycosis, the infection associated with *Mucorales*, have been on the rise for the past decade. Previously, scientists have suggested that contaminated medical devices could be a reason for this, but researchers from the University of Pittsburgh have identified hospital linens as another cause of the infection. The study shows that forty-seven percent of frshly delivered healthcare linenes in the hospitals studied contained *Mucorales* upon arrival.

Cleaning Hospital Linens

Healthcare is a business, and cutting costs is one of the ways a business makes money. In the modern age, that has translated to outsourcing hospital laundry, as the hospital is no longer obligated to pay for the equipment, energy, and manpower needed to wash their linen. Much of the process is now automated.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z-sjZySkIEg
This automation isn’t necessarily a bad thing, especially if there’s a way to push for more environmentally friendly laundry practices. Still, this study shows there is cause for concern regarding the outsourcing of washing linens.

Recommended: *Everything You Need To Know About Fungal Infections*

Why Hospitals Breed Pathogens

While the washing of the linens no longer happens in hospitals, it can't be denied that healthcare facilities are excellent breeding grounds for bacteria and fungus that cause potentially dangerous infections. Hospitals are where people who are dealing with these infections go. It makes sense that those pathogens will be present.

Modern medicine, in particular antibiotics, compounds the issue though. Antibiotics are designed to destroy all of the bacteria in the gut. While this can eliminate the present infection, it also kills the beneficial bacteria that balance the microbiome. There are also pathogens that antibiotics don't eliminate. Those pathogens grow stronger in the microbiome vacuum created by the antibiotics. In a hospital setting, you don't even need to take antibiotic yourself to experience these effects. A study from 2016 found that patients were more likely to develop a C.diff (a notoriously hospital-friendly pathogen) infection if the previous occupant of their hospital room or bed was given antibiotics.

Risky Business

People in hospitals are constantly exposed to infection. A frequent source of exposure is improperly cleaned medical devices, but this study adds another culprit into the mix, the linens. We can all agree that we need to limit our exposure to certain microbes, but indiscriminately killing them all leaves us with no natural defenses. Are the number of fungal infections up because there is more dangerous fungus out there? Or is it because we are increasingly ill-equipped to deal with them?

Sources:

- *How Clean Are Your Linens?* – NEJM Journal Watch

- *How Clean Is the Linen at My Hospital? The Mucorales on Unclean Linen Discovery Study of Large United States Transplant and Cancer Centers* – Oxford Academic
- *Healthcare-associated outbreaks due to Mucorales and other uncommon fungi* – European Journal of Clinical Investigation
- *Laundry: The 'Fastest Growing Outsourced Service'* – Becker Hospital Review
- *Antibiotic Side Effects Are Contagious – C. Diff Infections Are On the Rise* – Organic Lifestyle Magazine