

PROVINCE PUSHES HANDWASHING IN NEW INFECTION-CONTROL STRATEGY

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Handwashing is a key element of new provincial standards to cut the risk of infection in Alberta health-care facilities.

Health Minister Dave Hancock announced the new guidelines Wednesday in Calgary after a review of a superbug outbreak in Vegreville.

In March, St. Joseph's Hospital was temporarily closed when it was revealed patients had been treated with improperly sterilized equipment.

To ensure a uniform standard of hygiene and infection control across the province, Hancock said the province is going to spend \$16 million to improve facilities, including adding more sinks for handwashing. "It doesn't sound very profound, but if there's one thing that we could encourage, that we could educate, that we could emphasize, it's that something as simple as ... proper hand hygiene at appropriate times can make a huge difference in our health system," he said.

'It doesn't sound very profound but ... proper hand hygiene at appropriate times can make a huge difference in our health system.'—Dave Hancock, Alberta health minister

Hancock said health-care workers washing their hands can stop many problems before they start, preventing infections or stopping the spread of superbugs in hospitals.

Every regional health authority is also now responsible for meeting the new standards and tracking the compliance in their facilities. They will also have to appoint someone responsible for infection prevention and control.

Hancock said clarity was necessary because each health region seemed to work differently and there was confusion at the Vegreville hospital about who was responsible for ensuring rules were followed. The new policies take effect Feb. 1.