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Microbial contamination of hospital reusable cleaning towels

[Laura Y. Sifuentes](#), PhD, [Charles P. Gerba](#), PhD, [Ilona Weart](#), BS, [Kathleen Engelbrecht](#), MS, [David W. Koenig](#), PhD

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Background

Hospital cleaning practices are critical to the prevention of nosocomial infection transmission. To this end, cloth towels soaked in disinfectants are commonly used to clean and disinfect hospital surfaces. Cloth cleaning towels have been linked to an outbreak of *Bacillus cereus* and have been shown to reduce the effectiveness of commonly used quaternary ammonium disinfectants. Thus, it is important to determine whether the reuse of cloth towels increases the risk of pathogen transmission in hospitals.

Methods

The goal of this project was to determine the effects of laundry and cleaning practices commonly used in hospitals for washing, storage, and disinfection of cloth cleaning towels on their microbial loads.

Results

Our results indicate that cloth towels used for cleaning hospital rooms contained high numbers of microbial contaminants.

Conclusions

In this case, hospital laundering practices appear insufficient to remove microbial contaminants and may even add contaminants to the towels. Furthermore, it has been previously reported that towels can interfere with the action of common hospital disinfectants. Either independently or in combination, these 2 factors may increase the risk for transmission of pathogens in hospitals. These observations indicate the need to critically reevaluate current hospital cleaning practices associated with reuse of cloth towels.

Key Words: [Disinfectant](#), [Infection control](#), [Nosocomial infection](#), [Reusable towels](#)

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Conflict of interest: None to report.

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