Water Management Programs and Waterborne Disease Prevention in Health Care Facilities

- Water can carry germs that threaten patient safety and spread antimicrobial-resistant pathogens or cause health care-associated infections (HAIs).
- Premise plumbing (e.g., devices and fixtures such as faucets, drains, HVAC humidifiers and ice machines) is at-risk for biofilm build up and harboring dangerous germs.
- Disease-causing germs that can build up in premise plumbing include *Legionella, Mycobacterium* and multidrug-resistant organisms (MDROs), such as *Acinetobacter* and *Pseudomonas*.

Water Management Programs

- Health care facilities must continually evaluate their water system for risk to harbor and transmit dangerous germs.
- Water management program (WMP) action steps:
  - Set up a team to develop, implement, monitor and evaluate a WMP
  - Describe the building water systems
  - Conduct a water infection control risk assessment (WICRA)
  - Identify areas where pathogens could grow and spread
  - Decide how to implement and monitor control measures
  - Establish interventions for when control limits are not met
  - Document and communicate all WMP activities
- Required by CMS and Joint Commission

For a comprehensive overview of water management programs, please visit CDC: Overview of WMP

Best Ways to Protect Patients

- Choose sink designs to minimize splashes.
- Install splash guards and/or do not store patient care items next to sinks.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces in and around sinks daily.
- Dispose of patient waste in appropriate locations (e.g., not in handwashing sinks).
- Close toilet lids before flushing. If lids are not available, close any door that separates the toilet from other patient care areas.
- Properly maintain equipment that utilizes water, such as ice machines, hydrotherapy equipment, heater-cooler units, etc.
- Consider routinely flushing infrequently used fixtures and sections of plumbing with little to no flow (dead legs).

For more information on how to reduce risks, please visit CDC: Considerations for Reducing Risk

Additional Resources

CDC: Healthcare Facility Water Management Program Checklist
CSTE: Water Management Program Template

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