



POLICY & ACTION FROM CONSUMER REPORTS

July 29, 2015

Dear Representative:

Consumers Union, the public policy and advocacy arm of Consumer Reports, writes to raise concerns about the high rate of patient infections in hospitals nationwide. Every year, an estimated 648,000 people in the U.S. develop infections during a hospital stay and about 75,000 die, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Many of these illnesses and deaths can be traced back to the use of antibiotics, the drugs intended to fight the infections.

As part of its commitment to address the urgent health crisis of antibiotic-resistant “superbugs,” Consumer Reports today released new ratings of more than 3,000 U.S. hospitals, showing which hospitals do a good job of avoiding patient infections, and which do not. These ratings are included in the report, “How Your Hospital Can Make You Sick,” which is available in the September 2015 issue of *Consumer Reports* magazine and at ConsumerReports.org/cro/hospitalinfections2015.

This report is the second piece in a three-part investigative series on America’s antibiotic crisis. The first article explained how the overuse and misuse of antibiotics is leading to the rise of superbugs, and the final installment will examine the role antibiotics play in our meat supply.

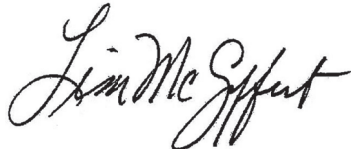
Consumer Reports’ hospital ratings reflect an analysis of the most recently available infection data reported by hospitals to CDC. For the first time, these ratings include information about the common and deadly infections MRSA (methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*) and *C. diff* (*Clostridium difficile*). Elevated MRSA or *C. diff* rates can be a red flag that a hospital is not following best practices in preventing infections and prescribing antibiotics. The new MRSA and *C. diff* ratings, along with updated ratings reflecting information on central-line associated blood stream infections, surgical-site infections, and catheter-associated urinary tract infections, make up a larger composite infection score for individual hospitals.

Good hospitals focus on the basics: using antibiotics wisely and keeping their facilities clean. These practices, combined with federal mandates for public reporting of some infections, have led to reduced rates of certain infections. But Consumer Reports believes hospitals need to do more, including consistently following established protocols for managing superbug infections, covering all costs for treating infections patients pick up during their stay including costs incurred after discharge, and having an antibiotic stewardship program that includes mandatory reporting of antibiotic use to CDC. Hospitals also should accurately report how many infections patients get in the hospital and promptly report outbreaks to patients – as well as to state and federal health authorities, which should inform the public of these outbreaks.

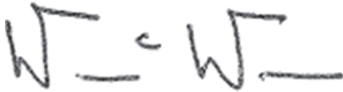
At the same time, patients can be their own advocate by questioning the use of antibiotics and insisting on a clean hospital room. They can also consult Consumer Reports' hospital ratings when making healthcare decisions for themselves and others.

Thank you for considering our concerns and recommendations. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lisa McGiffert". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Lisa McGiffert
Senior Policy Analyst and Project Director, Safe Patient Project
Consumers Union

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "William C. Wallace". The signature is written in a stylized, blocky font.

William C. Wallace
Policy Analyst
Consumers Union