



TODAY, IN 1876

George A. Custer and his 7th Cavalry were wiped out by Sioux and Cheyenne Indians in the Battle of the Little Bighorn in Montana.

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Staph germ infects more than thought

5% at care facilities may have superbug

By Mike Stobbe
Associated Press

ATLANTA — A dangerous, drug-resistant staph germ may be infecting as many as 5 percent of hospital and nursing home patients, according to a comprehensive study.

At least 30,000 U.S. hospital patients may have the superbug at any given time, according to a survey released today by the Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology. The estimate is about 10 times the rate that had been previously estimated.

At issue is a superbug known as Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus, which cannot be tamed by certain common antibiotics. It is associated with sometimes-horrific skin infections, but it also causes blood infections, pneumonia and other illnesses.

The potentially fatal germ, which is spread by touch, typically thrives in health-care settings where people have open wounds. But in recent years, "community-associated" outbreaks have occurred among prisoners, children and athletes, with the germ spreading through skin contact or shared items.

Past studies have looked at how common the superbug is in specific patient groups, such as emergency-room patients with skin infections

in 11 U.S. cities, dialysis patients or those admitted to intensive care units in a few hundred teaching hospitals.

It's difficult to compare prevalence estimates from the different studies, experts said, but the new study suggests the superbug is eight to 11 times more common than some other studies have concluded.

The new study sampled a larger and more diverse set of health-care facilities. It also was more recent than other studies, and it counted cases in which the bacterium was merely present in a patient and not necessarily causing disease.

The infection control professionals' association sent surveys to its more than 11,000 members and asked them to pick one day from

Oct. 1 to Nov. 10, 2006, to count cases. They were to turn in the number of all the patients in their health-care facilities who were identified through test results as infected or colonized with the bug. The final results represented 1,237 hospitals and nursing homes — or roughly 21 percent of U.S. inpatient health-care facilities, association officials said.

The researchers concluded that at least 46 of every 1,000 patients had the superbug. Most were identified within 48 hours of admission, which means, the researchers believe, that they didn't have time to become infected to the degree that a test would show it. For that reason, the researchers concluded about 75 percent of patients walked into the facilities already carrying the bug.