International Journal of Enhanced Research in Science, Technology & Engineering
ISSN: 2319-7463, Vol. 15 Issue 6, June-2026

# Isolation, Identification, and Characterization of Pathogenic Bacteria from Hospital Environmental Surfaces

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**ABSTRACT**

**Hospital environments serve as important reservoirs for pathogenic microorganisms responsible for healthcare-associated infections (HAIs). These infections contribute significantly to patient morbidity, mortality, prolonged hospitalization, and increased healthcare costs.**

**The present study aimed to isolate and identify pathogenic bacteria from various hospital environmental surfaces and assess their potential role in infection transmission. Environmental samples were collected from high-touch surfaces including bed rails, door handles, medical equipment, and patient-care areas using sterile swab techniques.**

**Isolation and identification of bacteria were performed using standard microbiological methods, including culture characteristics, Gram staining, and biochemical tests. The study identified clinically significant bacterial pathogens such as *Staphylococcus aureus*, *Escherichia coli*, *Klebsiella pneumoniae*, *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*, and *Acinetobacter baumannii*. The findings highlight the importance of routine environmental surveillance and strict infection control measures to reduce healthcare-associated infections and antimicrobial resistance.**

**Keywords: Hospital Environment, Pathogenic Bacteria, Healthcare-Associated Infections, Antimicrobial Resistance, Environmental Surveillance**

## INTRODUCTION

Healthcare-associated infections (HAIs), commonly known as nosocomial infections, remain a major challenge for healthcare systems worldwide. These infections are acquired during hospitalization and are often associated with increased morbidity, mortality, healthcare expenditure, and prolonged hospital stays. Hospital environments play a critical role in the transmission and persistence of pathogenic microorganisms because surfaces such as bed rails, door handles, medical devices, sinks, and patient-care equipment frequently become contaminated through direct or indirect contact.

The hospital environment serves as a reservoir for numerous pathogenic bacteria including *Staphylococcus aureus*, *Escherichia coli*, *Klebsiella pneumoniae*, *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*, and *Acinetobacter baumannii*. Many of these organisms possess the ability to survive for prolonged periods on inanimate surfaces and exhibit multidrug resistance, making infection control increasingly difficult. Environmental contamination contributes significantly to pathogen transmission through healthcare workers, medical devices, and patient contact.

The emergence of antimicrobial resistance has further intensified concerns regarding hospital contamination. Resistant organisms such as Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA), extended-spectrum beta-lactamase (ESBL)-producing Enterobacteriaceae, and carbapenem-resistant *Acinetobacter baumannii* have been frequently isolated from healthcare environments. Continuous monitoring and identification of environmental pathogens are therefore essential components of infection prevention and control programs.

The present study was undertaken to isolate and identify pathogenic bacteria from different hospital environmental surfaces and to evaluate their distribution and potential role in healthcare-associated infections.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was designed as a laboratory-based observational investigation conducted to isolate and identify pathogenic bacteria from hospital environmental surfaces. Sampling was carried out in different hospital units including intensive care units, operation theatres, general wards, outpatient departments, laboratories, and emergency rooms. These areas were selected because of their high patient turnover and frequent contact between healthcare workers and patients.

Environmental samples were collected from high-touch surfaces such as bed rails, door handles, bedside tables, ventilators, infusion pumps, medical equipment, switches, and other patient-care areas using sterile cotton swabs moistened with sterile saline. Samples were properly labeled and transported aseptically to the microbiology laboratory for immediate processing.

For bacterial isolation, samples were inoculated onto Nutrient Agar, Blood Agar, MacConkey Agar, and Mannitol Salt Agar and incubated aerobically at 37°C for 18–24 hours. Distinct bacterial colonies were subcultured to obtain pure cultures. Colony morphology including size, shape, color, margin, texture, pigmentation, and hemolytic characteristics was recorded.

Preliminary identification was performed using Gram staining and microscopic examination. Gram-positive and Gram-negative bacteria were differentiated based on staining characteristics and cellular morphology. Further confirmation was achieved through biochemical tests including catalase, coagulase, indole, methyl red, Voges–Proskauer, citrate utilization, urease, oxidase, and Triple Sugar Iron (TSI) tests.

Antibiotic susceptibility testing was performed using the Kirby–Bauer disc diffusion method on Mueller–Hinton Agar according to Clinical and Laboratory Standards Institute (CLSI) guidelines. Results were interpreted as sensitive, intermediate, or resistant based on inhibition zone diameters.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1 Distribution of Environmental Samples

Environmental samples were collected from various hospital units including intensive care units, operation theatres, general wards, outpatient departments, laboratories, and emergency rooms. High-touch surfaces such as bed rails, door handles, bedside tables, ventilators, infusion pumps, switches, and medical equipment were sampled.

**Table 1. Distribution of Sampling Sites**

| Sampling Site | Observation |
|---|---|
| Bed Rails | Frequently Contaminated |
| Door Handles | Frequently Contaminated |
| Medical Equipment | Frequently Contaminated |
| Ventilators | Frequently Contaminated |
| Bedside Tables | Frequently Contaminated |
| Switches and Other Surfaces | Moderately Contaminated |

The highest frequency of bacterial contamination was observed on high-touch surfaces that are repeatedly contacted by healthcare workers and patients.

### 3.2 Distribution of Bacterial Isolates

Microbiological analysis revealed widespread contamination of hospital surfaces by clinically significant bacterial pathogens.

**Table 2. Distribution of Major Bacterial Isolates**

| Bacterial Species |
|---|
| Staphylococcus aureus |
| Escherichia coli |
| Klebsiella pneumoniae |
| Pseudomonas aeruginosa |
| Acinetobacter baumannii |

Staphylococcus aureus was among the most frequently isolated organisms, particularly from dry environmental surfaces and patient-contact areas.

### 3.3 Gram Staining Characteristics

Microscopic examination demonstrated the presence of both Gram-positive and Gram-negative bacteria.

**Table 3. Gram Staining Characteristics of Isolates**

| Bacterial Group | Morphology |
|---|---|
| Gram-Positive Bacteria | Cocci in Clusters |
| Gram-Negative Bacteria | Bacilli (Rods) |

Gram-positive cocci were predominantly represented by Staphylococcus species, whereas Gram-negative bacilli included enteric and non-fermentative bacterial pathogens.

### 3.4 Biochemical Characterization of Isolates

Biochemical testing was performed for confirmation of bacterial identity.

**Table 4. Major Biochemical Characteristics of Isolates**

| Organism | Key Biochemical Reactions |
|---|---|
| Staphylococcus aureus | Catalase Positive, Coagulase Positive |
| Escherichia coli | Indole Positive, Methyl Red Positive |
| Klebsiella pneumoniae | Citrate Positive, Voges–Proskauer Positive |
| Pseudomonas aeruginosa | Oxidase Positive |
| Acinetobacter baumannii | Non-Fermentative Gram-Negative Bacillus |

The biochemical findings confirmed the identity of all recovered bacterial isolates.

### 3.5 Detection of Multidrug-Resistant Organisms

Antibiotic susceptibility testing demonstrated the occurrence of multidrug-resistant organisms within the hospital environment.

**Table 5. Important Resistant Organisms Detected**

| Resistant Organism |
|---|
| Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) |
| ESBL-Producing Enterobacteriaceae |
| Carbapenem-Resistant Gram-Negative Bacteria |

The detection of resistant organisms on hospital surfaces highlights the potential role of environmental contamination in the transmission of healthcare-associated infections.

### 3.6 Significance of Environmental Contamination

The persistence of pathogenic and antimicrobial-resistant bacteria on hospital surfaces indicates that healthcare environments act as important reservoirs for infection transmission. High-touch surfaces may facilitate indirect transmission through healthcare workers, medical devices, and patient contact.

The present findings are consistent with previous reports demonstrating that inadequate environmental disinfection contributes significantly to healthcare-associated infections. Regular environmental surveillance, strict hand hygiene practices, routine cleaning and disinfection protocols, and antimicrobial stewardship programs are therefore essential for minimizing infection risks and improving patient safety.

## CONCLUSION

The present study successfully isolated and identified pathogenic bacteria from various hospital environmental surfaces, confirming that healthcare environments serve as significant reservoirs of clinically important microorganisms. Commonly isolated pathogens included *Staphylococcus aureus*, *Escherichia coli*, *Klebsiella pneumoniae*, *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*, and *Acinetobacter baumannii*. These organisms possess the ability to survive on environmental surfaces for prolonged periods and contribute to healthcare-associated infections.

The occurrence of multidrug-resistant organisms within hospital environments further emphasizes the need for effective infection prevention and control strategies. Regular environmental surveillance, proper cleaning and disinfection, strict

hand hygiene practices, antimicrobial stewardship programs, and continuous monitoring of hospital surfaces are essential for reducing microbial contamination and preventing healthcare-associated infections. The study provides valuable baseline information for strengthening hospital hygiene practices and improving patient safety.

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