



Learning Activity:

Healthcare Environmental Scan



Getting Started

Overview:

This activity invites students in practicum courses to perform an environmental scan in their workplace. Students will practice recognizing infection risks and consider the common reservoirs and pathways associated with infection control that are encountered throughout the day in the healthcare environment. Additionally, students will identify infection control actions that can help prevent the spread of harmful germs by recognizing common reservoirs and pathways that enable germs to spread.

Please coordinate ahead of time with students' preceptors to make sure that this activity aligns with all necessary facility protocols. Students should adhere to ethical principles and confidentiality when conducting a healthcare environmental scan. Students should not disclose any confidential information obtained during the scan and ensure that no personally identifiable information is collected. This learning activity includes [Learning Activity Instructions](#) and a [Learning Activity Handout](#).

Course Type Recommendation: Courses for clinical healthcare students

Underlying Principle: Keeping patients, workers, and visitors safe from infections in healthcare settings requires recognizing infection risks and taking action to prevent the spread of germs.

Learning Objectives:

- Assess the risk of germ spread from reservoirs in a clinical setting.
- Identify necessary infection control actions to reduce the spread of harmful germs.

Key Terms:

- **Reservoir:** places on and in our bodies and in the environment where germs live and grow
- **Pathway:** how germs spread or get from one place to another

Key Resources:

[Project Firstline | Project Firstline | CDC](#)

[Infection Control in Health Care: An Overview | Project Firstline | CDC](#)

Recommended Rubric(s) for Assessment:

[VALUE Rubrics - Critical Thinking | AAC&U](#)

[VALUE Rubrics - Integrative Learning | AAC&U](#)

Learning Activity Instructions

1. Introduce the healthcare environment reservoirs that will be covered in this activity: water and wet surfaces, dry surfaces, dirt and dust, and medical equipment. Share the definitions for reservoirs and pathways with students provided on page two.

As a class, spend some time discussing students' varied practicum sites and how these reservoirs play a role in healthcare settings spaces. Consider questions such as:

- Why are these reservoirs important to infection control?
- What is the value in examining healthcare environment reservoirs in our practicum sites?
- How do you think germs can spread from these reservoirs and cause infection?

2. Invite each student to identify one example of each environmental reservoir. Introduce the attached worksheet and discuss the expectations and process for conducting an environmental scan at their practicum location. With the class, consider questions such as:

- How will you focus your observations on each type of reservoir? Are there setting-specific considerations to keep in mind or areas that require extra attention?
- Have you discussed your plan with your preceptor and reviewed how to properly maintain confidentiality and follow all relevant facility protocols?

3. Working with facility preceptors, give students a timeframe to complete the environmental scan at their designated practicum site.

4. At the conclusion of this activity, invite students to present findings to the class and share key takeaways and questions resulting from their observations. As a class, consider questions such as:

- How do different healthcare professions interact with these reservoirs?
- What actions can we collectively take to reduce the spread of harmful germs in the healthcare environment?



Learning Activity Handout

Healthcare Environmental Scan

Practicum location:

Environmental Reservoir Category	Reservoir Observed	Potential Pathways	Actions that may pose risk	Infection control actions that can help reduce risk
Dry Surfaces (e.g., bed rails, door handles, call button)				
Water/Wet Surfaces (e.g., sinks, faucets, ice machines)				
Medical equipment (e.g., blood pressure cuff, pulse oximeter, stethoscope)				

Now that you have identified environmental reservoirs, potential pathways, and actions that may pose or reduce risk at your practicum facility, please use the information you've gathered to address the following questions:

- 1.** What specific healthcare environment reservoirs did you identify that are prone to having germs live and grow on them?

- 2.** Based on your observations, what are examples of how healthcare workers interact with environmental reservoirs at your practicum location? Consider different healthcare roles.

- 3.** In what ways might germs spread from these healthcare environment reservoirs to other reservoirs? Try to think of specific healthcare tasks and pathways.

- 4.** What actions did you identify that healthcare workers take to reduce the risks for germs to spread? Consider different healthcare roles in your practicum location.

- 5.** What resources are present at the facility to help reduce the risks you have identified?
 - a. How could utilization of these resources be improved? (e.g., placing alcohol-based hand sanitizer in convenient areas for healthcare workers)
 - b. Did the healthcare workers have everything they needed to reduce risk?
 - c. What additional steps could be taken to help reduce risks?