

Hospital de-bug program

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Six Victorian hospitals will roll out a program in the next month to help curb the growing threat of an antibiotic-resistant strain of golden staph.

Staff at the Royal Melbourne, Western, Frankston, St Vincents, Bendigo and Wangaratta hospitals will be required to use an alcohol-based antiseptic to "de-bug" their hands before and after each patient contact.

The program, which has received \$1.97 million funding over three years from the State Government's Victorian Quality Council, has been heralded as a major weapon against in combating the deadly MRSA.

MRSA (methacillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*) is a hospital-acquired, antibiotic-resistant strain of golden staph.

The program follows a successful trial at Austin Health.

Austin Hospital infectious diseases unit director Professor Lindsay Grayson said the Aus-

tin Healthcare network had reported a 48 per cent reduction in the number of patients with MRSA in their blood since the trial started in 2001.

"That is more than 100 patients who otherwise would have had it in their blood," Grayson said.

He said the hospital had also introduced a mandatory training program to educate all health workers about infection control, and the use of alcohol-based wipes to clean equipment.

Royal Melbourne Hospital infectious diseases specialist Mike Richards said the number of Australian cases of MRSA had been steadily increasing since it was first detected in the 1980s.

Richards, head of the Vicniss database on hospital-acquired infections, said Australia's rate matched the UK and US.

His comments came as a UK scientist warned deaths could double in the next five years.

Dr Mark Enright, of Bath University called for further studies to fight the problem.