



Joint CDC-CMS Communiqué on the Importance of Adhering to CDC Infection Definitions

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) issued [a joint communiqué](#) today to NHSN users and hospital administrators reiterating the importance of adherence to CDC infection definitions. **We urge all infection preventionists to read the full [communiqué](#), but these talking points were developed to assist you with educating individuals in your facility about the importance of adhering to the CDC infection definitions.**

Q. Why are CDC and CMS releasing this document?

A. To emphasize that adherence to CDC healthcare-associated infection (HAI) definitions are essential to ensuring the accuracy, completeness, and comparability of infection information. In addition, CDC has also received reports of actions that indicate a need for clarification.

Q. What could happen if a hospital doesn't make sure that their NHSN data is reported accurately?

A. Hospitals are required to adhere to existing protocols, definitions, and criteria to ensure that their data are comparable to other organizations. Failure to adhere to these protocols could lead to revocation of NHSN enrollment as well as other penalties for failure to comply with CMS reporting requirements.

Q. How do I answer questions from physicians and others that disagree with me, saying that a case that clearly meets the NHSN definition is not an infection?

A. It may be helpful to remind them that the definitions you follow are not for clinical diagnosis, but rather to provide reliable, actionable data that can be used to drive improvement and prevent infections. Specifically, surveillance definitions have different components and purposes than clinical diagnosis definitions. Your work requires that you follow the CDC definitions and CMS requirements exactly. The following information from a March 2014 CDC training presentation may be a helpful reminder to share within your facility:

- **Surveillance Definitions:**
 - **Purpose:** Identify trends within a population for prevention and research
 - **Components:** Limited predetermined data elements
- **Clinical Diagnoses:**
 - **Purpose:** Identify disease in, and treatment needs for, individual patients
 - **Components:** All diagnostic information

Q. Sometimes, I think I have valuable insight about how NHSN definitions can be improved. Where do I submit recommendations on improving NHSN protocols, specifications and criteria?

A. Submit comments to nhsn@cdc.gov

Q. Who do I contact if I am aware of intentional deviations from NHSN reporting protocols I have raised within my facility, but are not being addressed?

A. The HHS Inspector General hotline may be reached by telephone at 1-800-HHS-Tips or via email at HHSTips@oig.hhs.gov