

ZIMEK SUCCESS STORY

New machine will battle germs at county jail

By Gary Mays / gmays@daily-journal.com / 815-937-3359

On the heels of last week's "superbug" scare at Jerome Combs Detention Center, Kankakee County is poised to be among the first in the state to use a new device for disinfecting jail cells.

Last week a jail employee and an inmate contracted Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA). Sometimes called a "superbug" due to its ability to spread and its resistance to many medications, cases of the disease nonetheless are fairly common and typically occur in jails, hospitals, school locker rooms and other settings, said Sheriff Tim Bukowski.

Now he's hoping the new disinfecting machine will at least cut down on the likelihood of any future cases or outbreaks in the 3-year-old jail.

"I was told when we bought it that we were probably the first jail in the state to use it," said Bukowski, whose correctional deputies began testing the machine on Friday.

In fact, news of the two MRSA cases broke just as the jail was taking delivery of its new Zimek "portable room sterilizer," said the sheriff.

Undersheriff Brad O'Keefe described operation of the machine as "shooting a mist into places that water can't reach and pretty much kills everything for up to six months."

It looks like a giant vacuum on wheels and is programmable for varying conditions and contaminants, and "converts Zimek's EPA-registered disinfectants into a vaporous flurry of sterilizing micro-particulates with the power to kill dangerous invisible indoor microscopic environmental contaminants," according to Zimek's online literature.



Prisoner-paid

The device was purchased using money from the inmates' commissary. By law, profits from the commissary must be spent on things that directly benefit inmates, Bukowski said, adding that "we think this does have a direct benefit" for them.

O'Keefe said jail employees are familiarizing themselves with the new machine and have yet to establish a firm protocol for its use. He did say, however, that the jail infirmary and other areas will likely be sprayed frequently, as will the cells of inmates who have been identified as having any communicable illness.

"There's no way we could do it every time an inmate changes cells," he said.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, MRSA infections in the community are usually manifested as skin infections, such as pimples and boils, and occur in otherwise healthy people. While MRSA most often causes skin irritations, it also can infect the bloodstream, the lungs or the urinary tract. It is sometimes, though rarely, life-threatening, experts say.

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