

## 15 dead as US flu season intensifies

As the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention warned it might, this flu season indeed seems to be more severe than in years past. In fact, the [CDC said](#) the percentage of deaths attributed to pneumonia and influenza was at the epidemic threshold as of Dec. 20, 2014.



There have been [15 reported deaths](#) caused by the flu as of Dec. 20, spread between nine states: Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Minnesota, North Carolina, Nevada, Ohio, Texas and Virginia, according to the CDC.

The flu is widespread in 36 states already, according to the CDC. Beyond restricting visiting hours to slow the spread of the flu, hospitals can access the myriad of free tools provided by the CDC that address 2014-15 flu recommendations. [Find those tools here](#). The CDC also offers [guidelines and educational resources](#) on flu-related infection control in healthcare facilities.

## A decade of investment in infection prevention: A cost-effectiveness analysis

Healthcare-associated infections are major concern for hospitals and the worries are compounded when they impact elderly patients. A new Columbia University study released this month examined the impact of infections, which kill more than 75,000 people each year and lead to \$33 billion in excess health care costs.

The study, published in the *American Journal of Infection Control*, examined a group of elderly patients who contracted an infection while in an Intensive Care Unit (ICU). The study concluded that preventing healthcare associated infections would also reduce health care costs by nearly \$150,000 per patient compared with an estimated cost of a hospital infection control program of \$145,000 per year.

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## HIPAA Hurdles in 2015

Nearly a year ago, Marla Durben Hirsh, published an article in *Medical Practice Compliance Alert* predicting physician practice compliance trends for 2014. Marla quoted Michael Kline’s prescient prediction that HIPAA would increasingly be used as “best practice” in actions brought in state court: “People will [learn] that they can sue [for privacy and security] breaches,” despite the lack of a private right of action under HIPAA itself. Now, peering ahead into 2015 and hoping to surpass Michael’s status as Fox Rothschild’s HIPAA soothsayer, I thought I would take a stab at predicting a few HIPAA hurdles that covered entities, business associates, and their advisors are likely to face in 2015.



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