

# Should Stethoscopes Be Cleaned?

## New study finds that dirty stethoscopes may spread germs

In a recent study, stethoscopes were tested after they were used to examine patients and most were found to have bacteria on them.

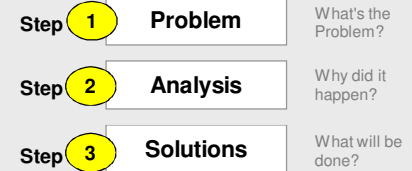
"We have no guidelines to clean our stethoscopes, which has as many bacteria on the diaphragm of the stethoscope as we have on our fingertips."

- Dr. Didier Pittet, "Contamination of Stethoscopes and Physicians' Hands After a Physical Examination" lead author and the director of infection control at University of Geneva Hospital in Switzerland

Cause Mapping is a Root Cause Analysis method that captures basic cause-and-effect relationships supported with evidence.

### CAUSE MAPPING

Problem Solving • Incident Investigation • Root Cause Analysis



## 1 Problem

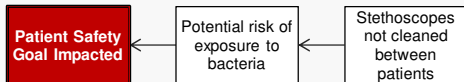
What	Problem(s)	Concern about potentially contaminated stethoscopes
When	Date	Ongoing
	Different, unusual, unique	??
Where	Facility, site	Healthcare facilities worldwide
	Unit, area, equipment	Stethoscopes
	Task being performed	Examining patients

### Impact to the Goals

Patient Safety	Potential risk of exposure to bacteria
Compliance	Question about whether requirements are adequate

## 2 Analysis

Basic Level Cause Map - Start with simple Why questions.



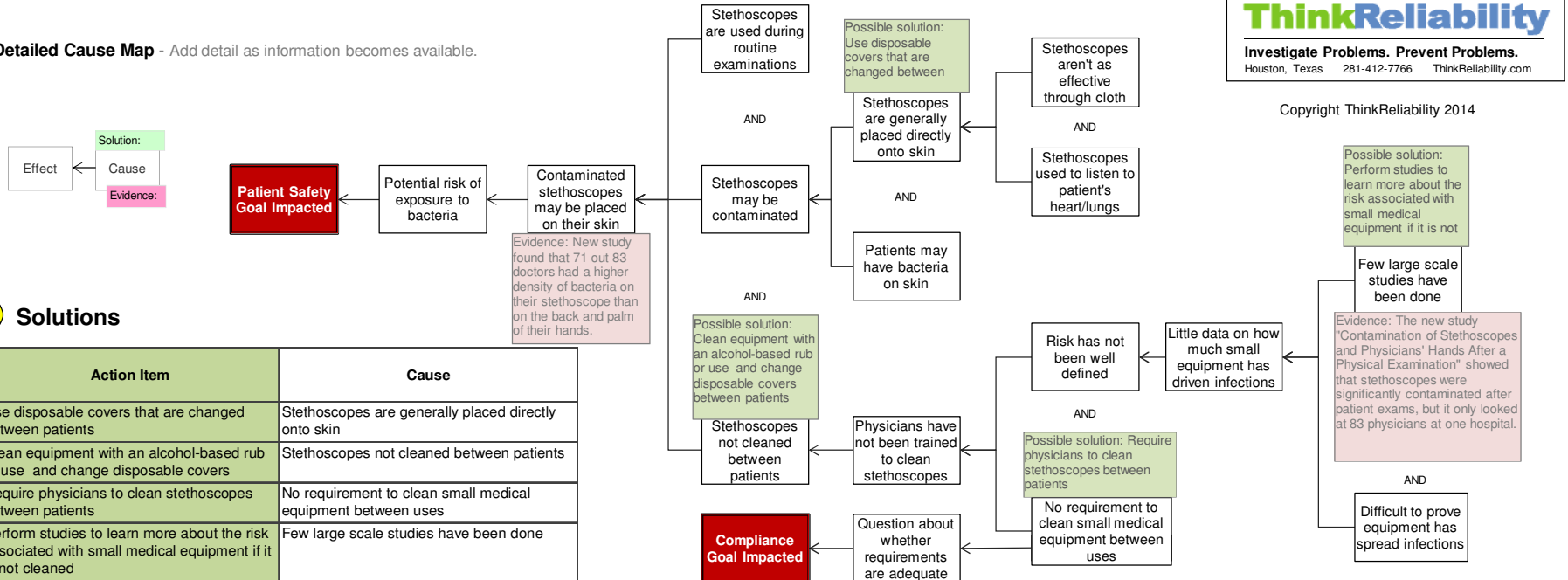
Basic Cause-and-Effect

The study looked at the stethoscopes used by three physicians as they examined a total of 83 patients in a Swiss hospital. The researchers found bacteria on the stethoscope after 71 of the patient examinations.

More Detailed Cause-and-Effect

Stethoscopes are commonly used to listen to a patient's heart and lungs and they work best when placed directly onto the skin. Stethoscopes may get contaminated from being used on a person with bacteria on their skin and stethoscopes are not necessarily cleaned between uses. Stethoscopes aren't always cleaned between uses because there are currently no guidelines requiring it.

More Detailed Cause Map - Add detail as information becomes available.



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## 3 Solutions

No.	Action Item	Cause
1	Use disposable covers that are changed between patients	Stethoscopes are generally placed directly onto skin
2	Clean equipment with an alcohol-based rub or use and change disposable covers	Stethoscopes not cleaned between patients
3	Require physicians to clean stethoscopes between patients	No requirement to clean small medical equipment between uses
4	Perform studies to learn more about the risk associated with small medical equipment if it is not cleaned	Few large scale studies have been done