thermometer use would be much greater, resulting in a cost savings of $220,851 to $856,851 over a 3-year period, even at the rates of infection observed in this study.

The infection control benefits of disposable thermometers demonstrated in this study may be achievable by other less expensive measures. More rigid disinfection practices, such as sponging the electronic thermometers with disinfectant for removal of *C difficile,* may decrease the rate of nosocomial *C difficile* infection, but no data are available regarding the effectiveness of such measures. Other less expensive forms of thermometers, such as individualized glass thermometers, might be expected to provide the same protection from cross-infection as single-use, disposable thermometers; but, these also have associated disadvantages, such as potential trauma from broken glass, mercury poisoning,[14] and increased nursing-time requirements. Further study is needed to define best how to minimize the role of thermometers as vectors in the transmission of nosocomial *C difficile* infections in a practical and cost-effective manner.

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HIV-Related Laws

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The AIDS Litigation Project has reviewed nearly 600 reported cases involving individuals with HIV infection and AIDS in the federal and state courts in the United States between 1991 and 1997. Cases were identified through a federal and 50-state computer and library search. An important subset of litigation relates to HIV and AIDS in the public health and healthcare systems, because the law affects healthcare institutions and professionals, patients, and public health policy in America. This subset of HIV and AIDS litigation includes testing and reporting; privacy, the duty to warn, and the right to know; physician standards of care in prevention and treatment; and discrimination and access to health care.

A review of these laws demonstrates a reliance on voluntary testing and protection of patient privacy through HIV-specific statutes and the common law. Negligence with potential civil and criminal liability has been alleged in cases of erroneous or missed diagnosis of HIV infection. In the first AIDS case to be considered by the Supreme Court, the court will decide whether patients with asymptomatic HIV infection are protected under the Americans With Disabilities Act.

The authors conclude that considerable progress has been made, both socially and legally, during the first 2 decades of the epidemic, but much still needs to be accomplished to protect privacy, prevent discrimination, and promote tolerance.

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