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## UTILIZING HAND SANITIZERS WHILE INCREASING SAFETY & COMPLIANCE

It is well documented that hand washing compliance among health care professionals is less than 50% of what it should be.\*

Proper hand hygiene is the single most important thing a caregiver can do to help stop the spread of infectious diseases. According to one study, out of 840 health care facilities, 95 percent use alcohol-based hand rubs.\*\*

In October 2002, in order to help improve hand hygiene practices, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) published a revised guideline for Hand Hygiene in Health Care Settings supporting the use of alcohol-based hand rubs.

According to the CDC, an alcohol-based hand rub is "an alcohol-containing preparation designed for application to the hands for reducing the number of viable microorganisms on the hands. In the United States, such preparations usually contain 60%–95% ethanol or isopropanol."

In order to maximize alcohol-based antiseptic effectiveness, it is important to have the products easily accessible in health care facilities. However, it also is important to take necessary safety precautions. The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) issued a Tentative Interim Amendment (TIA) in April 2004, revising their existing 2000 and 2003 editions of NFPA 101®, Life Safety Code® to allow alcohol-based hand rubs in patient rooms, corridors, and suites. Prior to the TIA, the code prohibited the use of alcohol-based hand rubs in exit corridors. It is a TIA because it has not gone through the entire standards-making process and is effective only in the interim between standard editions. In general, the code provides guidelines for corridor width, dispenser fluid capacity, horizontal spacing, and storage of alcohol hand sanitizers\*.

Code purchasing information is available on NFPA's Web site at [www.nfpa.org/Codes/index.asp](http://www.nfpa.org/Codes/index.asp). The next edition of the code is scheduled for 2005.

Currently, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services' (CMS) conditions of participation permit sanitizers in patient/resident rooms but prohibit placing alcohol-based hand rubs in exit corridors, based on its interpretation of the unrevised 2000 edition of NFPA 101®, Life Safety Code®. In order to update its interpretation, CMS will have to go through the full rule making process to adopt the amended code and allow corridor usage of alcohol-based hand rubs.

\* Larson, EL., Kretzker, EK. *Compliance with hand washing and barrier precautions.* *J Hosp Infect* 1995; 305:88-106

\*\* SHEA/APIC/EIN Online survey of Potential Fire Hazards of Alcohol-based Hand-rub Dispensers, March, 2003, *Infection Control Hospital Epidemiology* 2003 (in press).

### WHAT THIS MEANS FOR HEALTH CARE FACILITIES

Each hospital or nursing home should check to see what fire codes are applicable for their facility. Local or state fire codes may differ from national fire codes. A list of Web sites for most state fire marshals is provided by the National Association of State Fire Marshals and can be found at [www.firemarshals.org/links/sfmsites.html](http://www.firemarshals.org/links/sfmsites.html).

If CMS' conditions of participation are adhered to by your hospital or nursing home, it is CMS' position that until the issue is officially resolved, existing alcohol sanitizer dispensers in compliance with the TIA may remain in corridors, but new corridor dispensers should not be added.



## OPTIMAL PLACEMENT OF ALCOHOL-BASED ANTISEPTICS

By placing alcohol antiseptics at the point of need, health care professionals will avoid corridor placement issues. In its 2002 revised guideline, CDC recommended making alcohol-based hand rubs available “. . . in individual pocket-sized containers to be carried by HCWs [health care workers].”<sup>\*\*</sup> A key advantage of an instant hand sanitizer is its point of need availability, that is, immediately before, during, or immediately after resident or patient care. Since most care takes place in the resident’s room, the most likely point of need is also in the room, at the bedside. According to one study, an acute care facility showed a 36% decrease in infection rates when alcohol hand sanitizers were available to caregivers for pocket carriage and in wall-mounted dispensers “inside” every patient room.<sup>\*\*</sup> One study documents that hand hygiene rates were unaffected by installation of alcohol dispensers in hallways on two medical wards in an acute care setting.<sup>\*\*\*</sup>

*\* Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s MMWR Recommendations and Reports, October 25, 2002.*

*\*\* “The Use of Alcohol Hand Sanitizer as an Effective Infection Control Strategy in an Acute Care Facility,” J. Hilburn, E. Fendler, P. Groziak, P. Hammond*

*\*\*\* “Hand Hygiene rates unaffected by installation of dispensers of a rapidly acting hand antiseptic,” C. Muto, M. Sistrom, B. Farr*

## STEPS TO INCREASE HAND SANITIZER EFFECTIVENESS AND SAFETY

1. Keep instant hand sanitizers at the point of need by promoting pocket carriage or dispenser placement inside the patient or resident room.
2. Store large quantities of sanitizer products in rooms or areas designed or approved for materials with high alcohol content.
3. Remove sanitizers from areas above a heat source, electrical outlet, ignition source, or light switch.
4. After using an alcohol sanitizer, rub your hands thoroughly for at least 15 seconds to allow the alcohol to dissipate.
5. Install alcohol-based hand rub dispensers in non-carpeted areas.

### ADDITIONAL PERSPECTIVES:

The American Hospital Associations’ American Society for Healthcare Engineering (ASHE) commissioned a report in order to determine what type of fire safety hazard an alcohol-based hand rub could pose. The results showed corridor and suite locations are appropriate places for dispensers, and that there is no significant ignition risk associated with placing dispensers near the entrance to each patient room.\*

Some fire marshals concur, at least in part, with ASHE’s findings. In a November 2003 vote, the executive committee of the Hospital Fire Marshals’ Association (HFMA) supported the installation of alcohol-based hand-washing gels in corridors. HFMA believes dispensers can be safely installed in hospital corridors, provided that the dispensers are well spaced and not above a carpeted area.

*\* Alcohol-Based Hand Rub Solution Fire Modeling Analysis Report; Gage-Babcock and Associates*

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