

Journal of Outpatient Surgery

DISINFECTANT SURFACE WIPES –

Are they Effective or Simply Convenient?

J. Wagner, December 2010

Is it OK to take a 10-day antibiotic for only 2 days because you think you feel better?

Of course not. It just doesn't work and can even be downright dangerous!

Is it OK to leave a chemical disinfectant on a surface for only seconds when the prescribed instructions require a full 5 or 10-minute contact time?

Of course not. It doesn't work and can be downright dangerous!

Recently the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) required producers of commercially prepared pre-moistened wipes (towelettes) to modify label use-instructions to accurately reflect the appropriate steps necessary to assure complete disinfection of inanimate patient care surfaces.

In the past, users of wipes have been led to believe by insinuation that they need only to wipe a surface and allow the solution to evaporate and air dry; regardless as to whether the surface stayed visibly wet for the wet contact time required for the product to work!

Nothing is further from the truth and sets a dangerous practice.

The EPA has directed producers to specifically state "the surface must remain 'visibly wet' for the prescribed contact time in order to produce disinfection". In other words, if the

disinfection time listed on the label is 10-minutes, the surface must remain visibly wet for the entire 10-minutes. The key phrase in this new directive is "visibly wet".

Some healthcare workers have interpreted claims to imply that simply wiping surfaces then walking away is sufficient. This puts patients and staff at risk of exposure to environmentally transmitted infectious microorganisms such as MRSA.

EPA requirements are very specific as to the manner in which a disinfectant is to be used and applied.

Furthermore, EPA requirements are very specific as to the minimum amount of time, in minutes, a particular disinfectant must remain visibly wet in order to allow the solution enough time to penetrate microbial cell walls and kill all target microorganisms listed on the label.

Infection control experts know that some microorganisms, such as the hepatitis b virus (HbV) and staphylococcus aureus (staph) bacteria are able to survive for long periods of time on dry surfaces and both have long been identified as causes of serious outbreaks from cross-contamination

Infection control experts also recognize that disinfectants intended for use on patient care equipment must kill mycobacteria tb and list it on the

label along with its appropriate kill time. Using an EPA registered disinfectant in a manner inconsistent with its labeled instructions is a violation of federal law and is so stated on all EPA approved disinfectant labels. Proper and consistent use of a disinfectant solution, per its label instructions, is so critical that use-directions are required to be clearly written on every registered disinfectant product label.

Failing to follow EPA approved cleaning/disinfecting instructions not only subjects' patients and staff (along with their family members at home) to exposure of potentially infectious agents, but also exposes the user and healthcare facility to litigation and citation in the case of an outbreak or nosocomial infection. EPA, OSHA and state health departments strongly enforce infringements.

Be safe. Do not select a disinfectant for convenience sake only.

Select the most efficacious product available, then read and follow the directions for use. Do not put your patients, yourself or your family at risk simply for convenience sake.

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