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HAND HYGIENE TIMES



Selecting the best hand hygiene products for your healthcare workers: key factors to consider

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Hand hygiene has been a primary intervention for reducing germs on healthcare workers' (HCW) hands since the days of Semmelweis.¹ Accordingly, the World Health Organization (WHO) has recommended hand hygiene as an important strategy to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 in hospitals.²

Selecting the best hand hygiene products for your facility can be challenging and often confusing. Not all hand hygiene products are created equal, so it's important to carefully assess the products under consideration at your facility. Product formulation is critical for the development of truly mild yet efficacious hand hygiene products that can be used many times during a work shift. And poorly formulated products can have a negative impact on skin health and subsequently on acceptance and use of the product.

Alcohol-based hand rubs (ABHR) are the international standard for hand hygiene in healthcare settings when hands are not visibly soiled because they have superior efficacy and better skin tolerability and save time compared to handwashing³; however, soap and water also play a critical role in a comprehensive hand hygiene program. Efficacy is of primary importance in product selection and is a pillar in a well-formulated product. When it comes to ABHR, many people think that a higher concentration of alcohol is the key to a higher level of efficacy. The WHO recommends ABHR solutions containing 60%-80% alcohol but also states that higher concentrations of alcohol are less effective.³ So once inside the recommended concentration range for ABHR, bactericidal activity is maximal and overall product formulation becomes the differentiator in efficacy.⁴

ABHR are complex formulations, and alcohol concentration is just one variable of product formulation. Other ingredients are added to create specific attributes including skin tolerance, skin moisturization, and aesthetic properties. These additional ingredients can in some cases improve or inhibit the formulation's antimicrobial efficacy.⁴

How a hand hygiene product affects skin health is especially important in environments such as healthcare where repeated use scenarios are common. Ensuring skin tolerance of products is critical to maximizing acceptance and hand hygiene compliance.³ Product aesthetics and skin feel are also focused towards end-user acceptance. Aesthetic considerations can begin with how the product looks (color), the product form (foam or liquid, gel), sensory experience during use (how it lathers and rinses), scent/fragrance and skin feel after use. The bottom line is that if HCW do not like a product, they will be less likely to use it, so skin tolerance, aesthetics, and skin feel considerations should not be minimized.

When faced with the challenge of choosing new hand hygiene products, it is important for key decision makers to be armed with as much knowledge as possible. Although ABHR should remain the primary method for performing hand hygiene, soap continues to be an important piece of the hand hygiene regimen. Evaluating both products in terms of efficacy, skin health, and aesthetics/skin feel can be helpful. As always, allowing HCW the opportunity to try products and provide input is a critical aspect of product acceptance.³ While selecting hand hygiene products may not be easy, being well informed about the options and key selection factors can help make the process easier.

¹ Stewardson A, Allegranzi B, Sax H, Kilpatrick C, Pittet D. Back to the future: rising to the Semmelweis challenge in hand hygiene. *Future Microbiol* 2011;6:855-76.

² Lotfinejad N, Peters A, Pittet D. Hand hygiene and the novel coronavirus pandemic: The role of healthcare workers [published online ahead of print 2020 Mar 19]. *J Hosp Infect* 2020;S0195-6701(20)30116-X.

³ World Health Organization. WHO Guidelines for hand hygiene in health care. Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organization; 2009.

⁴ Edmonds SL, Macinga DR, Mays-Suko P, et al. Comparative efficacy of commercially available alcohol-based hand rubs and World Health Organization-recommended hand rubs: Formulation Matters. *Am J Infect Control* 2012;40:521-525.



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