

Disinfectant Surface Wipes: Effective or Simply Convenient?

Written by Jack Wagner, President, Micro-Scientific | March 30, 2011

The following article is written by Jack Wagner, president of [Micro-Scientific](#), a producer and distributor of antimicrobial products.

Is it OK to take a 10-day antibiotic for only two 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 U.S. Environmental Protection Agency 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 in advertised claims 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 advertised claims to imply that simply swiping surfaces then walking away is sufficient. This puts patients and staff at risk of exposure to environmentally transmitted infectious microorganisms.

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 and staphylococcus aureus 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 members (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 because disinfectants are meant to kill infectious microorganisms. 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.

Learn more about Micro-Scientific at www.opticide.com.