



Safe Use of Medical Gels

Background:

Medical gels are routinely used in clinical practice during physical exams and diagnostic procedures.

Medical gels include ultrasound gels, lubricating gels and other medicated gels.

Contamination of these gels from improper handling can occur during their use and result in health care associated infections. In order to ensure the safe use of these gels, IPAC makes the following recommendations:

Indication	Sterile Gel	Non-sterile Gel
Procedures where skin and mucous membranes are penetrated.	√	
Patients with immunodeficiencies or those on immunosuppressive therapy.	√	
Non-intact skin	√	
Intact skin		√
Vaginal and rectal exams		√

General Considerations:

- Single use containers are required for sterile gels.
- Once a sterile gel package has been opened, it is no longer sterile.
- Sterile gels must be used with aseptic technique.

Reusable Bottles:

- Reusable bottles may be used only for **non-sterile** gels.
- Bottles with non-sterile gels must never be topped up (i.e. refilled when partially empty).

- The bottle that the non-sterile gel is kept in must be inspected for cracks. Only if completely intact can the bottle be reused after being washed in a clean sink or basin using hot soapy water.
 - Any gel on the outside or neck of the bottle must be washed off.
- The bottle must then be rinsed well with tap water and thoroughly dried prior to refilling.

Filling Reusable Bottles:

- Ensure that the large bulk container of non-sterile gel has not expired.
- When filling the bottle use aseptic technique (i.e. do not touch the opening of either container with your hands or allow them to touch environmental surfaces).
- When refilling reusable bottles with non-sterile gel, do not insert the tip of the refillable bottle into the bulk container to aspirate contents.
- Reusable bottles should be refilled as close as possible to the time they will be needed for use.
- Put the date that the smaller reusable bottle was filled on it and discard the gel within it after one month of that date.

Use of Non-Sterile Gel:

- Check the expiry date on the reusable bottle of gel prior to each use.
- Tips of gel bottles must not come into contact with a patient, staff, instrumentation or the environment.
- Wipe the dispensing nozzle with a 70% alcohol swab and wipe the outside of the bottle with a low level hospital grade disinfectant between each use.
- If a gel is being used for a patient on Additional Precautions use a single-use gel container.

- For procedures that are done infrequently, use small reusable bottles or single-use containers.

Warming the Gel:

- Warm the gel only when it is needed.
- Remove bottles from the warmer as soon as possible and dry them immediately.
- Clean the warmers weekly (following the manufacturers' instruction) with a low level hospital grade disinfectant.
 - If the warmer becomes soiled, clean immediately.

Storage of Gels:

- Products must be stored in areas where they will be protected from sources of contamination such as moisture, dust, insects etc...
- If in doubt about the integrity of the medical gel, discard the product.
- Products should be rotated when restocking takes place to ensure that older products are used first.

References:

Canadian Society of Diagnostic Medical Sonography: Professional Practice Guidelines and Policy Statements for Canadian Sonography (n.d.). Retrieved May 3, 2011 from, <http://www.csdms.com/docs/ppgps.pdf>

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