

Medical Gels

Background

Medical gels* are used routinely in clinical practice during physician exams and diagnostic procedures. Contamination of medical gels from improper handling can result in serious health care associated infections such as bacteremia and septicemia.¹⁻¹³

*Medical Gels include ultrasound gels, lubricating gels, and medicated gels.

Position Statement

To provide for safe handling of medical gels, the following is recommended.

1. INDICATIONS FOR PARTICULAR GELS

Indication	Type of Gel	
	Sterile	Non-sterile
Whenever a biopsy, puncture of any kind, or imminent surgery is to be performed regardless of body site	√	
Near a fresh surgical wound	√	
Procedure penetrating mucous membrane	√	
Endoscopies on intact mucous membranes	√	
Non-endoscopic procedure on mucous membranes (e.g., vaginal/ rectal exam)	√	
Non-intact skin	√	
Intact skin		√
Babies in NICUs and critical pediatric patients ⁽¹¹⁾	√	

2. GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

a) Sterile gel:

- Single use packaging is required for sterile gel as once opened, the contents are no longer sterile
- Sterile product should be used, employing the principles of asepsis

- Discard the opened package at end of procedure

b) Non-sterile gels:

- If multi-dose containers of non-sterile gel are used on intact skin, the container should be sealed correctly when not in use.¹¹
- Dispensing nozzles must not come into direct contact with patients, staff, instrumentation, or the environment.⁵
- Non-sterile gel containers should never be topped up (i.e., refilled when partially empty).
- Containers of gel should never be washed and refilled for use but should be discarded when empty.¹¹
- When a new bottle is opened, the bottle should be initialled by the opener, dated and discarded after 30 days or the manufacturer's expiry date if earlier.⁵
- Bulk containers of gel should not be used due to risk of contamination.

c) Warming of Gel

- Do not warm gel due to the increased risk of bacterial growth¹².
- Gels are generally stored at room temperature unless manufacturer's recommendations state otherwise.

d) Storage of Gels

- Products must be stored in clean areas where they are protected from sources of contamination such as moisture, dust, insects, etc.
- Discard the medical gel if in doubt about integrity.

This position statement was developed by Standards and Guidelines Committee:

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Glossary/Definitions

As per the Canadian Standard Association (CSA):

“SHALL” is used to express a requirement, i.e., a provision that the user is obliged to satisfy in order to comply with the standard;

“SHOULD” is used to express a recommendation or that which is advised but not required; and

“MAY” is used to express an option or that which is permissible within the limits of the standard, an advisory or optional statement.

References

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