

Medical Gels

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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.^{1-8,11-14} Medical gels, even bacteriostatic formulations, provide a medium for bacteria to survive and multiply.

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

Position Statement

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

1. INDICATIONS FOR USE OF MEDICAL GELS^{1,9,10}

Indication	Single dose Sterile	Non-sterile
Percutaneous procedures where contact with the puncture site is possible, includes but is not limited to: biopsy, vascular access, or procedural pain management (e.g., steroid injection into joint).	✓	
Imminent surgery may be performed regardless of body site	✓	
Near a 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

- A new single use package of sterile gel must be used for each client.
- Single use packaging is required for sterile medical gel as once the sterile medical gel package is opened, it is no longer considered sterile.
- Sterile product must be used employing the principles of asepsis.
- Discard the opened package at end of procedure.

b) Non-sterile gels

- Nonsterile medical gel containers must never be topped up (i.e., refilled when partially empty)
- If multi-dose containers of non-sterile medical gel are used on intact skin, the container must be sealed correctly when not in use⁶
- To avoid contaminating the medical gel, use aseptic technique when removing and replacing the cap and dispensing the gel
- Tips of containers must not come into direct contact with a patient, staff, or instrumentation
- Medical gel containers should not be washed and refilled for use but should be discarded when empty⁶
- Bulk containers of medical gel are not recommended due to risk of contamination, therefore their use should be discouraged
- When a new bottle is opened, the bottle should be dated and discarded after 1 month or expiry date if earlier⁹

c) Warming of Medical Gel

- Do not warm medical gel due to the increased risk of bacterial multiplication.¹⁴

d) Storage of Medical 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
- Always check the expiration date. Do not use if expired.

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.

Stakeholders

Healthcare and other workers in acute care facilities, long-term care homes, clinical offices, and communal settings in the community

Participants in Development of Position Statement

This position statement was developed by Standards and Guidelines:

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