

Alcohol-Based Hand-Rubs and Fire Safety CDC Update

September 15, 2003

Alcohol-based hand sanitizers are an important strategy for improving healthcare personnel hand-hygiene practices, reducing healthcare-associated infection and improving overall patient safety. Alcohol-based hand-rubs have been used safely for more than 30 years in European hospitals.

Existing national fire codes permit hand-rub dispensers in patient rooms, but prohibit their installation in egress or exit corridors. (Note: Local or state fire code requirements may differ from the national codes; therefore, facilities are strongly urged to determine requirements for their particular locale.)

Healthcare organizations are encouraged to install dispensers in patient rooms, treatment rooms, suites and other appropriate locations. Healthcare facilities should work with local fire marshals to ensure that these installations are consistent with local fire codes.

Safety Tips When Using Alcohol-based Hand-Rubs

When using alcohol-based hand-rubs, CDC recommends that:

Healthcare personnel rub their hands until the alcohol has evaporated (i.e., hands are dry).

Alcohol-based hand-rubs be stored away from high temperatures or flames, in accordance with CDC and National Fire Protection Agency recommendations.

Supplies of alcohol-based hand-rubs be stored in cabinets or areas approved for flammable materials.