

Using Alcohol-Based Hand Rubs to Meet National Patient Safety Goal 7

National Patient Safety Goal 7, requirement 7A, requires **ambulatory care, assisted living, behavioral health care, critical access hospital, disease-specific care, home care, hospital, laboratory, long term care, and office-based surgery** organizations to comply with current Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) hand hygiene guidelines (<http://www.cdc.gov/handhygiene>). The CDC guidelines include more than 30 recommendations that are divided into two categories. Category I recommendations have strong supporting evidence; category II recommendations are supported by suggestive clinical or epidemiologic studies or a theoretical rationale. Through goal 7A, the Joint Commission requires organizations to implement all category I recommendations (IA, IB, IC) and recommends implementing category II recommendations. Under CDC hand hygiene guidelines, when hands have no visible soil, they may be disinfected with either an alcohol-based hand rub (ABHR) or soap and water, but when visible soiling is evident, soap and water must be used. The CDC encourages staff members to use ABHR when no soiling is present and recommends that all health care organizations make ABHR available. As a category I recommendation, making ABHR available is required by National Patient Safety Goal 7A.

Several studies have confirmed the efficacy of ABHR and have demonstrated higher levels of compliance with hand hygiene recommendations when ABHR dispensers are located just outside the entrances to patients' rooms. In most organizations, this would result in placement of dispensers in egress corridors. The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) and the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) have recently determined that organizations can place ABHR *gel* dispensers outside patients' rooms in egress corridors.

The Joint Commission's official stand on the use of ABHR is described below.

ABHR Gel: Dispensers in Egress Corridors

The Joint Commission allows ABHR *gel* dispensers in corridors provided that the following conditions are met:

- The corridor width is 6 feet or greater and dispensers are at least 4 feet apart.
- The dispensers are not installed over or directly adjacent to an ignition source such as an electrical outlet or switch. *Adjacent* is defined as being at least 6 inches from the center of the dispenser to an ignition source.
- In locations with carpeted floor coverings, dispensers installed directly over carpeted surfaces are permitted only in sprinklered smoke compartments.

ABHR Gel: Permissible Volume

Permissible volumes of an ABHR *gel* are as follows:

- Each smoke compartment may contain a maximum aggregate of 10 gallons (37.8 liters) of ABHR *gel* in dispensers and a maximum of 5 gallons (18.9 liters) in storage.
- The maximum individual dispenser fluid capacity is 0.3 gallons (1.2 liters) for dispensers in rooms, corridors, and areas open to corridors.
- The maximum dispenser size for individual dispensers in areas designated as suites of rooms is 0.5 gallons (2.0 liters).

ABHR Foam: Permissible Location and Volume

Industry experts have indicated that small-quantity ABHR *foam* dispensers *may* be equivalent to ABHR *gel*. Therefore, pending further review, the Joint Commission will allow any ABHR *foam* installation that meets the location criteria stated above for ABHR *gel*. Volumes of ABHR *foam* are based on suppliers' recommendations and in no case exceed the permissible volumes for ABHR *gel* as defined above. In the event that subsequent testing demonstrates a safety concern relating to *foam* dispensers in egress corridors, the Joint Commission reserves the right to modify its position on the acceptability of such installations. In that event, previously installed dispensers would be subject to the newer restrictions; that is, they would not be "grandfathered," and noncompliant installations would have to be removed.

Risk Assessment to Manage Risks

The Joint Commission's official stance on ABHR is based on the latest information in the NFPA 101-2000, *Life Safety Code*®.* As with other areas of the *LSC*, organizations may not meet all the requirements completely but may still provide an equivalent level of safety through assessing and managing the specific construction, systems, or operation of an area. Likewise, an organization that cannot meet all the requirements outlined in this article may perform a product-specific risk assessment of the ABHR product using product literature and determine alternative methods to achieve an equivalent level of safety.

For more information about using ABHR foams or gels, please contact George Mills, Senior Engineer, Standards Interpretation Group, at gmills@jcaho.org. ▲

* Life Safety Code® is a registered trademark of the National Fire Protection Association, Quincy, Massachusetts.