

Can Antibacterial Wipes Spread Superbugs?

Reuters, The Canadian Press

ABSTRACT

It is a common misconception that antibacterial wipes can be used on multiple surfaces without taking into consideration that instead of disinfecting, they may actually be spreading infectious pathogens. Regardless if staff have access to the best disinfectant on the market, education is paramount to ensure that a product's efficacy is achieved.

BACKGROUND

Reuters and The Canadian Press picked up a story regarding research conducted on three types of wipes – one containing detergent, another containing a disinfectant and a third containing a natural antimicrobial product at the Cardiff University's School of Pharmacy. According to both Reuters and The Canadian Press, the data from study showed that if antimicrobial wipes are used on more than one surface, they could transfer pathogens from one surface to another. The researchers concluded that guidance needs to be given to the staff on how to use wipes with provision of guidelines stating that antimicrobial wipes should be used on a single surface only – One Wipe, One Surface.

STUDY

Are these findings surprising? NO! If we read the articles carefully it is clear that the study is not stating antimicrobial wipes are ineffective. The study is reinstating best practices of how to appropriately use products and confirming what everyone involved in environmental services should already know.

Best practices for cleaning surfaces, regardless of

whether an antimicrobial wipe, terry cloth or microfiber cloth is used dictates that we clean in order from cleanest to dirtiest, that we use clean areas of a cloth on each new surface and that we change cloths when visibly soiled or when moving from one area to another. These are the principles that we teach our environmental services staff – one cloth for patient areas and one cloth for bathroom areas and to simplify we often use different coloured cloths by location. Cloths should be changed when visibly soiled. Clean, unused sections of the cloths should be used on each surface – the principle of folding cloths in to 8's, clean an area, fold the cloth to use a new section to clean the next area and so forth.

As Dr. Andrew Simor, head of Microbiology at Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre in Toronto was quoted to say "North American infection control recommendations would specify that a wipe should be used to clean a single area and then should be discarded."

Education is paramount to ensuring products are used appropriately. If staff using cleaning and disinfecting products do not have the basic understanding of best practices for cleaning within a healthcare facility there is a risk of transferring pathogens from one surface to another. As suppliers of cleaning and disinfecting products to facilities you also need to consider that while your initial contact for example may be with Environmental Services or Infection Control, products do tend to find the way into all areas of the facility. Training then needs to be provided to everyone who may be using the products to ensure they are used correctly. Support staff that have a responsibility for

cleaning and disinfecting surfaces or medical equipment need to be included and invited to training sessions on the appropriate and correct methods to be used for cleaning and disinfecting.

CONCLUSION

As Gareth Williams the lead researcher for the study stated “We found the most effective way to prevent the risk of MRSA spread in hospital wards is to ensure the wipe is used only once on one surface”. Although this study had a healthcare focus, its results are relatable to the animal health field. Best practices for infection control and biosecurity recommend exactly this and this is how we train our staff; we just need to ensure that all staff within the facility understands how to appropriately use antimicrobial wipes.

REFERENCES

The Reuters article can be downloaded at:

<http://www.reuters.com/article/email/idUSL0383329520080603?sp=true>

The Canadian Press article can be downloaded at:

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/health/story/2008/06/04/antibacterial-wipes.html>

