

Medical Gels

Note: This information was developed by the IPC Medical Gels Working Group. Gels used for wound care are excluded; refer to the Alberta Health Services [Wound Manual](#).
Terms in bold are defined in the **Definitions** section.
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Best practice recommendations

Medical gels, e.g., ultrasound gels, lubricating gels, commonly used for physical examinations and diagnostic procedures, are available in either sterile or non-sterile formulations/packaging. Some types of medical gels are available in both formulations, e.g., **bacteriostatic** gels can be either **sterile** or non-sterile.

Using contaminated gel for invasive procedures or on mucous membranes may result in serious infection. An open container or package is no longer considered sterile.

- 1. Single-use medical gels are preferred.**
- 2. Use medical gels labelled as sterile by the manufacturer for:**
 - invasive procedures, e.g., biopsies, skin punctures, or imminent surgery;
 - procedures involving sterile equipment;
 - non-intact skin;
 - mucous membranes, e.g., urethral catheter, esophageal, gastric, rectal or vaginal transducers/scopes;
 - neonates.
- 3. Use non-sterile medical gels on intact skin only.**
- 4. Minimize the risk of contamination by following [Routine Practices](#), including the [4 moments](#) of hand hygiene.**
 - 4.1 Perform [hand hygiene](#) before touching the container or package.
 - 4.2 Read and follow manufacturer's instructions or labelling for use, sterility, dispensing, storage and expiry.
 - 4.3 Avoid contaminating the container or tip:
 - 4.3.1 Do not touch the tip to any surface.
 - 4.3.2 Seal the container by replacing the cap after use.
- 5. If multi-use containers are used, follow these recommendations (in order of preference):**
 - 5.1 Choose the smallest suitable size and dedicate the medical gel to a single patient with ongoing medical gel needs within the patient care area. Discard the container when it is no longer being used for that patient.
 - 5.2 Choose the smallest suitable size. With the use of Routine Practices, the container can be used on multiple patients within the diagnostic setting. Discard the container when empty or if there is evidence of contamination.
- 6. Warming medical gels in an uncapped container may increase risk of contamination.**
 - 6.1 Warm medical gels in a closed container and only if the product label provides directions on how to safely do so.
 - 6.2 Remove medical gels from the warmer as soon as possible.

6.3 Clean and disinfect warmers when visibly soiled and on a regular schedule according to the manufacturer's instructions.

7. Improper storage of medical gels may increase the risk of contamination

7.1 Store medical gels in a clean, dry area protected from potential sources of contamination, e.g. dust, moisture, rodents etc. For more information refer to the IPC best practice recommendation on [Storage of Clean and Sterile Supplies in Clinical Areas](#).

7.2 Discard medical gels if evidence of contamination or if packaging integrity is breached.

Definitions

Bacteriostatic means inhibiting growth or multiplication of bacteria.

Medical gel means a jellylike substance containing a medicine or other preparation, e.g., ultrasound gels are generally composed of a polymer for viscosity, substances to stabilize the pH, deionised water, a moisture retaining agent such as a glycol derivative, and preservative agents. Medical gels, even bacteriostatic formulations, provide a medium for bacteria to survive and multiply.

Routine Practices means a comprehensive set of infection prevention and control measures/ activities, including hand hygiene and selection and use of appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE), for use in the routine care of patients. Routine Practices apply to all patients, at all times, in all health care settings. For more information, refer to the Alberta Health Services [Routine Practice Resources](#).

Sterile means free from viable microorganisms, unopened packages which are labelled 'sterile' by the manufacturer.

References

1. Canadian Society of Diagnostic Medical Sonography. 2014. Professional Practice Guidelines and Policy Statements for Canadian Sonography. Retrieved from https://www.sonographycanada.ca/Apps/Sites-Management/FileDownload/DataDownload/46650/SC_ProfPractice%20Eng%20Rev%2003Feb2017%20final/pdf/1/1033.
2. Health Canada. 2004. Recalls and safety alerts. Notice to hospitals - Important Safety Information on Ultrasound and Medical Gels. Retrieved from http://www.healthycanadians.gc.ca/recall-alert-rappel-avis/hc-sc/2004/14290a-eng.php?_ga=1.243051650.1024799928.1416943151.
3. Infection Prevention and Control Canada (IPAC-Canada) 2016. Position Statement. Medical Gels. Retrieved from <https://ipac-canada.org/photos/custom/Members/pdf/2017JanMedicalGel2016.pdf>.