

Decolonization of Non-ICU Patients With Devices

Section 14-7 – Addressing Questions Asked by Staff: Safety and Side Effects of Chlorhexidine and Iodophor

This hospital will be using chlorhexidine gluconate (CHG) and nasal iodophor to reduce bacteria that can cause infection in adult non-ICU patients with medical devices. Both products have excellent safety profiles.

CHG and iodophor are over-the-counter antiseptics that have been used in healthcare for more than 60 years. They are only used topically, and are not absorbed into the bloodstream during use. In addition, both CHG and iodophor are FDA-cleared products that are considered safe for topical use in adults.

Most people have no side effects when using iodophor or CHG. However, as is true for any product, there may be exceptions with their use. With topically applied products like iodophor and CHG, the most common side effect is irritation at the site of application.

Are CHG and Iodophor commonly used?

CHG has been used for cleansing and bathing of millions of patients. Its use is currently considered standard of care for:

- Central line and surgical skin prep
- Surgical preoperative bathing
- Wound cleansing and irrigation
- Daily bathing in intensive care units

How safe are CHG and Iodophor?

Local CHG side effects are estimated to occur in 1–3 percent of patients.

Possible side effects from CHG use include:

- Skin irritation
- Rash
- Redness of the skin

These side effects are generally mild and resolve quickly when CHG use is stopped.

True allergy to iodine (the active ingredient in iodophor) does not exist since iodine is required naturally in our bodies. Other ingredients in the nasal iodine application swab may infrequently cause side effects that include:

- Mild nasal discomfort
- Nasal congestion
- Nasal irritation

What should I do if I suspect my patient is having an allergic reaction to CHG or iodophor?

In extremely rare circumstances, severe allergic reactions to CHG or topical nasal iodophor have been reported. Such serious reactions are so rare that their occurrence prompts the submission of case reports. However, if you think a patient may be developing a severe allergic reaction (including hives, severe itching, difficulty breathing, tightness in the chest, or swelling of the mouth, face, lips, or tongue), stop the decolonization drug and **immediately** call for rapid response. For less severe side effects, please contact the treating physician.

Any questions regarding issues related to the decolonization products should be directed to the patient's nurses and treating physicians.

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