Decolonization:   
Staff Frequently Asked Questions  
Safety & Side Effects

**This document provides questions and answers to commonly asked questions. Some questions and answers may not be relevant to your unit. You should remove or edit information to match your unit’s protocols.**

The products for decolonization that are discussed in this toolkit have excellent safety profiles and have been shown to be safe and effective in multiple clinical trials.

The decolonization products are only used topically and are not absorbed into the bloodstream. These products have been used safely in healthcare for many years and are considered safe for topical use in adults.

Most people have no side effects when using CHG, mupirocin, or iodophor. However, as with any product, side effects may occur. With topically applied products, the most common side effect is irritation at the site of application.

## Safety and Side Effects

### Is chlorhexidine gluconate (CHG) 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

### Is nasal mupirocin commonly used?

Nasal mupirocin has been used in thousands of patients , in intensive care units, in pre-operative care, and in the outpatient setting to prevent both methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) and methicillin-susceptible *Staphylococcus* *aureus* (MSSA) infection.

### Is nasal iodophor commonly used?

Povidone-iodine has been safely used in healthcare for over 60 years and is cleared by the Food and Drug Administration for use in the nose.

### What are the side effects of CHG?

Local CHG side effects are rare, estimated to occur in 1% to 3% of patients. These side effects are typically mild and resolve quickly once CHG is discontinued.

Possible side effects from topically applied CHG use include:

* Skin irritation
* Rash
* Redness of skin

**It is important to keep the CHG out of eyes and ears.** CHG can cause permanent injury if it comes in direct contact with nerves and is allowed to remain there. For example, this may occur if CHG enters the ear canal, and the patient has a perforated (punctured) eardrum. **If CHG enters the patient’s eyes or ear canals, it is important to rinse thoroughly with water immediately.**

### What are the side effects of nasal mupirocin?

The use of topically applied nasal mupirocin may cause mild side effects that include:

* Burning
* Change in sense of taste
* Congestion
* Cough
* Headache
* Sore throat
* Stinging
* Stuffy nose (unlikely)

Side effects are usually mild and resolve with discontinuation.

### What are the side effects of nasal iodophor?

The use of topically applied nasal iodophor may cause mild side effects that include:

* Nasal irritation
* Rash
* Redness of skin
* Runny nose
* Sneezing

Side effects are usually mild and resolve with discontinuation.

Allergy to nasal iodophor is exceedingly rare. Infrequent side effects include:

* Mild nasal discomfort
* Nasal congestion
* Nasal irritation

### **What should I do if I suspect my patient is having an allergic reaction to the decolonization agent**?

In **extremely rare** circumstances, severe allergic reactions to CHG, topical nasal mupirocin, or topical nasal iodophor have been reported. Such serious reactions are so rare that their occurrence prompts the submission of case reports.

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 for all patient care needs. Any questions regarding issues related to the decolonization products should be directed to the patient’s nurses and treating physicians.

**Adapted from** “Universal ICU Decolonization: An Enhanced Protocol”:

[*https://www.ahrq.gov/hai/universal-icu-decolonization/index.html*](https://www.ahrq.gov/hai/universal-icu-decolonization/index.html)

and

“Toolkit for Decolonization of Non-ICU Patients With Devices”:

[*https://www.ahrq.gov/hai/tools/abate/index.html*](https://www.ahrq.gov/hai/tools/abate/index.html)

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