

What are cleaning and disinfectant wipes?

Wipes are ready-to-use products, that consist of a disposable cloth impregnated with detergents and / or disinfectants; they are a convenient and quick means of cleaning or disinfecting surfaces. The mechanical action of wiping a surface can remove organic debris including visible dirt, dust, etc; this mechanical cleaning action may also remove some microorganisms. Some wipes contain disinfectants; these will have bactericidal, viricidal and / or sporicidal activity to kill some microorganisms <https://www.rcn.org.uk/clinical-topics/infection-prevention-and-control>

When can you use cleaning and disinfectant wipe?

The main purpose of wipes is to remove contamination from surfaces. Some wipes may provide some disinfection activity by the inclusion of a disinfectant although this activity might be limited based on how long the disinfectant liquid is in contact with the surface, the type of surface and the level of contamination present.

Wipes can be used in clinical situations for the cleaning or disinfection of low risk equipment and the near-patient environment. Examples of common usage include the cleaning or disinfection of tables, lockers, mattresses and bed frames, commodes, examination couches, blood pressure cuffs, pulse oximeters, keyboards, drug trolleys, intravenous pumps, stands and many other items. In social care settings, you may use wipes on any equipment used for more than 1 resident, on items that an individual residents touches frequently, such as mobility aids, and on items that an individual resident may not be able to keep clean themselves, such as watches, eye glasses, etc.

What's the difference between a detergent wipe and disinfectant wipes and combined wipes?



Detergent wipes

These contain only a cleaning agent and not a disinfectant. Detergents are essential to the cleaning process, releasing dirt from the surface. Following use, dirt and a proportion of the micro-organisms will be retained by the wipe and removed on it. Any micro-organisms not removed from the surface could subsequently be transferred to residents or other locations.



Disinfectant Wipe

These contain only a disinfectant. Just like a damp cloth, wipes that do not contain a detergent will have only limited cleaning properties, due to the friction created during cleaning physically removing some micro-organisms. Once the wiped surface dries, all disinfectant activity stops and, should any residue of disinfectant be left behind, it will have no effect on further dry contamination such as microbes (including spores) in dust, which will inevitably settle on it or be transferred to it soon after cleaning, disinfectants in wipes will only work while wet – in other words before they dry on a surface (usually only a matter of seconds) – the contact time in some tests can grossly overestimate the level of disinfection that will be achieved by the wipe in practice.



Combined

Some wipes available contain both a disinfectant and an additional detergent; these help remove dirt and organic materials but too much dirt and dust can inactivate the disinfectant; therefore, it is important to ensure that heavily soiled areas are cleaned before using a combined or disinfectant wipe.

Managing wipes in everyday use

There are a few key points to consider to ensure wipes are used effectively:

1. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for storage guidance (where to store and length of storage life).
2. Ensure stock rotation and undertake regular checks for wipes in packets/containers to make sure these have not dried out or expired.
3. Consider the need to clean wipes containers/packets depending on risk of contamination of external container surfaces
4. Ensure wipes are only used for their intended purpose— for example detergent or disinfectant wipes specifically for use on the environment should not be used for decontamination of skin.
5. Ensure all staff who will use wipes have received training on how and when to use them (the process of wiping as part of cleaning training) to help guarantee consistency and efficacy of use.

Key points when selecting an appropriate wipe for your organisation

- ✓ Do your research first. What is the intended purpose for using the wipes?
- ✓ Check any relevant manufacturer's guidance to determine if wipes can be used (applies mostly to medical equipment).
- ✓ Link in with your local infection prevention team for advice and guidance
- ✓ Consider whether detergent and/or disinfectant/ or combined wipes are required.
- ✓ Investigate manufacturer's information and efficacy claims carefully.
- ✓ Consider potential product limitations, for example, efficacy limited by active ingredients (if disinfectant used) and exposure time.
- ✓ Trial a number of different wipes if possible before making an informed decision on their suitability.
- ✓ Review any potential dermatological effects on staff using the wipes and liaise with occupational health advisers locally if needed
Consider any training requirements for wipes use and who will provide this.
- ✓ Consult staff during trials so they can inform any purchase decisions.
- ✓ Evaluate any trial thoroughly.
- ✓ Ensure processes are in place for stock checks and rotation to ensure product's continued suitability and effectiveness in practice.
- ✓ Set a review date to ensure your workplace uses the most suitable and effective wipes available (both in terms of outcomes and costs)