

Reference: IM/2020/008
Subject: Alcohol-based hand rubs - risk of fire

This information message is sent to draw the attention of Equipment Co-ordinators to information which may be relevant to the safety of equipment and facilities in NHS Boards and Local Authorities. Please find the information below.

IRIC is drawing attention to an incident in which someone used alcohol-based hand rub to clean their hands. However they did not dry their hands properly and an electrostatic discharge ignited residual alcohol vapour when they touched a metal surface. This resulted in a near-invisible flame on both hands which caused first and second degree burns

IRIC published [SAN\(SC\)06/27](#) in 2006 on the fire risk associated with alcohol-based hand rubs. This message is being issued as a reminder that staff using these products should let their hands dry fully so that vapours disperse before:

- touching ANYTHING including conducting surfaces such as metal, electrical switches or any electrical equipment (e.g. medical devices)
- using oxygen or operating a medical device which uses oxygen
- handling a patient or bedding if the patient is receiving oxygen
- smoking or being near an ignition source (e.g. match / lighter)

Health Protection Scotland (HPS) has provided advice on hand hygiene technique referenced in the National Infection Prevention and Control Manual (NIPCM) [here](#) which includes guidance on when and how to use alcohol-based hand rub. Up to date infection prevention and control measures (which covers hand hygiene) can be found on the dedicated HPS Coronavirus webpages [here](#)

World Health Organisation (WHO) advice on the risk and hazards associated with alcohol-based hand rubs [here](#)

As the Equipment Co-ordinator for your organisation, we recommend that you assess whether or not to forward this information to managers and staff within your area of responsibility who might benefit from being aware of it.

If you received this message directly from IRIC, email us at nss.irc@nhs.net or phone 0131 275 7575 quoting the IM reference number. Alternatively, if you have received this message from someone in your own organisation, please direct all enquiries to them and they will liaise with IRIC as required.

Incident Reporting & Investigation Centre (IRIC)

Health Facilities Scotland

NHS National Services Scotland

Contact us:

IRIC Email nss.irc@nhs.net

Helpline 0131 275 7575

<http://www.hfs.scot.nhs.uk/services/incident-reporting-and-investigation-centre-irc-1/>