

expenditures specifically to nosocomial infections, because most cases are complicated by other problems, including admitting diagnoses, diabetes, or other infections.

The CDC has suggested that handwashing before and after contact with each patient is the single most important means of preventing the spread of infection.¹⁷ Observations of handwashing practices and techniques by nursing personnel on all services show that staff do not adhere strictly to handwashing practices. Staff often are frustrated by inadequate supplies of paper towels, delays in obtaining handwashing soaps, and the common use of bed linens to dry hands. All of these factors, plus the chronic overcrowded conditions, contribute to the spread of infection.

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EPA Charges Illegal Claim for Antibacterial-Impregnated Consumer Products

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On December 5, 1997, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) issued a civil administrative complaint charging Microban Products Co, Huntersville, NC, with making unsubstantiated public health claims for its pesticide, Microban Plastic Additive "B." The complaint charges Microban with making claims that certain consumer products treated with the pesticide protect children from infectious diseases caused by bacteria such as *Escherichia coli*, staphylococci and streptococci, when in fact the treatment was approved only to protect the plastic in the prod-

ucts from deterioration. EPA is seeking \$160,500 in civil penalties.

The use of unapproved public health claims in conjunction with the sale of consumer goods, such as sponges, toys, and cutting boards, may pose a risk to the public. In the case of toys, parents and child-care providers could conclude easily from the claims authorized by Microban that the mere presence of Microban in toys provides protection from harmful germs and, hence, a public health benefit. If parents and child-care providers believe that toys are sanitary or self-sanitizing, they may not practice standard hygiene to prevent transmission of harmful germs or be as careful as they should be. The net result may be that

children's health is less protected.

Microban Plastic Additive "B" is registered by the EPA to inhibit bacterial growth in plastic, and no public-health-related claims have ever been accepted for this pesticide. Under the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act, it is illegal to make claims for any pesticide that differ from those claims approved in connection with the pesticide's registration. The EPA plans to contact companies that incorporate registered products to emphasize their obligation to comply with the law and to provide such companies with an opportunity to come into compliance.

FROM: US EPA Press Release; EPA Home Page.