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Standard Test Method for Determining the Bacteria-Eliminating Effectiveness of Hygienic Handwash and Handrub Agents Using the Fingerpads of Adult Subjects¹

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^{ε1} NOTE—Editorial corrections were made throughout in July 2004.

INTRODUCTION

Hands can spread many types of pathogens directly (**1**)² or by transfer of such organisms to other surfaces and objects during casual contact (**2,3**). Therefore, regular and proper decontamination of hands by caregivers and food-handlers in particular is crucial for infection control. Hygienic hand antisepsis is meant to reduce the load of transient microflora on hands, thereby reducing the risk of disease transmission. Such reduction in the bacterial load may be due to a combination of bacterial inactivation and removal of viable bacteria from the skin. In this method the test bacterial suspension is placed on the thumb- and fingerpads of adults to simulate the contamination of hands with transient microflora, the inoculum on the fingerpads is allowed to dry and is then treated with test and control solutions. Since in each test all ten digits on any given subject can be used, the protocol permits the inclusion of the required controls and several replicates of the test formulation in the same trial.

1. Scope

1.1 This test method is designed to determine the activity of hygienic handwash and handrub (**4**) agents against transient bacterial flora on hands and is not meant for use with surgical hand scrubs or preoperative skin preps.

1.2 Performance of this procedure requires the knowledge of regulations pertaining to the protection of human subjects.³

1.3 The test method should be performed by persons with training in microbiology in facilities designed and equipped for work with infectious agents at biosafety level 2 (**5**).

1.4 *This standard does not purport to address all of the safety concerns, if any, associated with its use. It is the responsibility of the user of this standard to establish appropriate safety and health practices and determine the applicability of regulatory limitations prior to use.*

¹ This test method is under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee E35 on Pesticides and is the direct responsibility of Subcommittee E35.15 on Antimicrobial Agents.

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² The boldface numbers in parentheses refer to the list of references at the end of this standard.

³ *Federal Register*, Vol 46, No. 17, Jan. 27, 1991.

2. Referenced Documents

2.1 *ASTM Standards*:⁴

D1129 Terminology Relating to Water

E1115 Test Method for Evaluation of Surgical Hand Scrub Formulations

E1173 Test Method for Evaluation of Preoperative, Precatheterization, or Preinjection Skin Preparations

E1174 Test Method for Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Health Care Personnel Handwash Formulations

E1838 Test Method for Determining the Virus-Eliminating Effectiveness of Liquid Hygienic Handwash and Handrub Agents Using the Fingerpads of Adult Volunteers

3. Terminology

3.1 *Definitions*—For definitions of general terms used in this test method, refer to Terminology D1129.

3.2 *Definitions of Terms Specific to This Standard*:

⁴ For referenced ASTM standards, visit the ASTM website, www.astm.org, or contact ASTM Customer Service at service@astm.org. For *Annual Book of ASTM Standards* volume information, refer to the standard's Document Summary page on the ASTM website.

3.2.1 *active ingredient, n*—a substance added to a formulation specifically for the inhibition or inactivation of microorganisms.

3.2.2 *dry control, n*—a control to determine the number of colony forming units of the test bacterium remaining viable after the initial drying of the inoculum on the skin.

3.2.3 *handrub, n*—a liquid or gel which is applied by rubbing to decontaminate lightly soiled hands between hand-washings and generally do not require a post-treatment water rinse; such agents usually contain alcohol alone or with other active ingredients.

3.2.4 *hard water, n*—water with a standard hardness of calcium carbonate.

3.2.5 *hygienic handwash agent, n*—an agent generally used for handwashing by personnel in hospitals, other health-care facilities, day-care centers, nursing homes, and food-handling establishments to eliminate transient microorganisms from intact skin.

3.2.6 *input control, n*—a control to determine the number of colony forming units of the test bacterium placed on each digit.

3.2.7 *neutralization, n*—a process which results in quenching the antimicrobial activity of a test material. This may be achieved through dilution of the test material(s) to reduce the antimicrobial activity, or through the use of chemical agents, called neutralizers, to eliminate antimicrobial activity.

3.2.8 *nonmedicated soap, n*—a soap or detergent that is mild to the skin and does not contain any antimicrobial chemicals.

3.2.9 *soil load, n*—a solution of one or more organic and/or inorganic substances added to the suspension of the test organism to simulate the presence of body secretions, excretions or other extraneous substances.

3.2.10 *test formulation, n*—a formulation which incorporates antimicrobial ingredients.

3.2.11 *test organism, n*—an applied inoculum of an organism that has characteristics which allow it to be readily identified. The test organism is used to simulate a transient topical microbial contaminant. It may also be referred to as a marker organism, bacterial simulant/surrogate or bacterial contaminant.

3.2.12 *test vehicle, n*—the test formulation without an active ingredient.

3.2.13 *transient microflora, n*—microorganisms from the environment that contaminate but do not normally colonize the skin.

4. Summary of Test Method

4.1 This test method is conducted on a group of adult subjects who have provided informed consent and the skin of whose hands has been determined to be free from any apparent damage. Panelists are to refrain from using any products containing antimicrobial agents for one week prior to the test. A known volume of the test bacterial suspension is placed on a demarcated area on each fingerpad and the inoculum allowed to dry. The contaminated area then is exposed to the control (standard hard water) or test formulation for the desired contact time and organisms remaining on the fingerpad are eluted and the eluates are assayed for viable bacteria. Percent reductions in the numbers of viable bacteria after treatment with the

control and test agents are then determined. The fingerpad method gives results that are comparable to those obtained using a whole-hand procedure (6). If two different formulations are being compared in the same test, one of them may be designated as a reference and used in place of the hard water control. If desired, one also may use tap water in parallel with the hard water control to determine the influence of water hardness on the test product's bacteria-eliminating activity.

5. Significance and Use

5.1 This in vivo procedure is designed to test the ability of hygienic handwash or handrub agents to eliminate selected types of bacteria from experimentally contaminated skin of the hands of adult subjects. Since the two thumbpads and all eight fingerpads can be used in any given test, it allows for the incorporation of an input control (two), control for viable bacteria remaining after the inoculum has been allowed to dry (two), bacteria eliminated after treatment with a control or reference solution (two), and up to four replicates to assess the bacteria-eliminating efficiency of the product under test. No more than 100 µL of the test bacterial suspension is required to complete one test. The results of testing with this test method may form the basis for confirmatory tests using a suitable whole-hand test protocol, such as Test Method E1174.

5.2 Whereas, this test method relates to testing with bacteria, it can be readily adapted to work with fungi (7), protozoa and bacteriophages. A similar method for work with viruses of human origin is already a test method, (Test Method E1838).

5.3 Potentially infectious microorganisms left on hands after washing can be reduced further by drying the washed hands with paper, cloth, or warm air (8). A step for the drying of fingerpads after exposure to the control or test solution, therefore, has not been included to avoid bacterial removal by the drying process itself.

5.4 This test method is not meant for use with surgical hand scrubs or preoperative skin preps.

5.5 The level of contamination with viable bacteria on each fingerpad after the drying of the inoculum should be five- to ten- fold higher than the product performance criterion required. For example, the titer in the dried inoculum on each fingertip should be about 10^5 colony forming units of the test bacterium when a $>10^4$ reduction is required under the conditions of this test method.

6. Equipment and Apparatus

6.1 *Colony Counter*—Any of several types may be used, for example, Quebec Colony Counter.

6.2 *Freezers*—A freezer at $-20 \pm 2^\circ\text{C}$ is required for the storage of culture media. A second freezer at -70°C or lower is required to store bacterial stocks.

6.3 *Handwashing Sink*—A sink of sufficient size to permit panelists to wash hands without touching hands to sink surface.

6.4 *Incubator*—Any incubator capable of maintaining the following temperatures: *Serratia marcescens* ($25 \pm 2^\circ\text{C}$); this temperature is necessary to ensure pigmentation) or *Escherichia coli*, *Staphylococcus aureus*, *Staphylococcus epidermidis* ($35 \pm 2^\circ\text{C}$).