

Patient Safety Alert

File Number: 19/20-02
September 26, 2019

DECANTING AND LABELING GUIDELINES FOR PREVENTION OF ERRONEOUS USE

There is potential for patient harm to occur when substances which are not intended for human ingestion are decanted from stock bottles and placed into other containers without appropriate labeling to identify the contents.

Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS) stipulates that workplace labels are required when:

- A hazardous product is produced (made) at the workplace and used in that workplace;
- A hazardous product is decanted (e.g. transferred or poured) into another container; or
- A supplier label becomes lost or illegible (unreadable). Hazardous products that are decanted and stored in containers other than the stock bottle have the potential to be used unintentionally. There is potential for errors in use of such products even if the new container is labeled.

Product handling, product identification and product use requires adherence to standard practices to avoid potential for erroneous and potentially harmful outcomes. The use of standardized practices, including proper labeling of hazardous products and double-checks, reduces the likelihood of harm to patients and/or staff.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Ministry of Health recommends that the Saskatchewan Health Authority and health care organizations:

- **Develop and use systems to reduce the potential for confusion when identifying products:**
 - Do not use containers that are not specifically meant for the substance to be contained within;
 - Ensure containers containing decanted substances are labeled with the correct information; and
 - Follow WHMIS guidelines when decanting substances/products.
- **Ensure all staff who handle hazardous products are aware of WHMIS labeling guidelines:**
 - If a hazardous product at a place of employment is in a container other than the container in which the hazardous product was received from a supplier, an employer shall ensure that a workplace label is applied to the container into which the hazardous product is placed (section 8-1 of *The Occupational Health and Safety – Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System – Regulations*).

- **Implement measures so staff are aware and consistently use safe decanting and labeling practices:**
 - Manufacturer-supplied stock bottles should be used as supplied where possible; and
 - Substances and products that need to be decanted into smaller containers for convenience of use should be placed into clearly labeled containers without any other pre-existing labels (to avoid confusion).
- **Ensure that a process for double-checks is in place when accessing substances or products for human ingestion.**
- **Follow the Safety Alert/Stop the Line (SA/STL) principles.** Focused on building a safety culture in Saskatchewan, this strategy includes processes, policies, and behavioural expectations that support patients, staff, and physicians to be safety inspectors, to identify and fix potentially harmful mistakes in the moment or ‘stop the line’ and call for additional help to restore safety.
 - “Stop the Line” empowers employees to speak up immediately if they see a risk to patient safety. STL encourages employees to report behaviours, action or inaction that might result in errors or patient harm. The initiative also makes clear that employees will be protected from retribution when reporting concerns to team members and supervisors.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

- *The Occupational Health and Safety (Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System) Regulations August 17, 2016; Sections 8(1) and 8(2).*
<http://www.publications.gov.sk.ca/details.cfm?p=81729&cl=5>

BACKGROUND

An unapproved hand hygiene product (a powdered hand cleaner), was unintentionally used in the preparation of food. The error was identified after the food item was prepared. The hand cleaner had been applied to the outside of a roast. The outside of the meat was removed and the remainder of the meat was served to residents and staff members.

SUMMARY OF CONTRIBUTORY FACTORS AND ANALYSIS

The decanting incident involved: A transfer of a hand sanitizer product from a store-bought container to a container with a spice label affixed without any additional labeling or writing to identify the fact that there was a different substance in the bottle (other than the original, now-incorrect, label).

A lack of standard practice in a facility along with variation in individual work practices contributed to the potential for error and resulting harm.

Patient Safety Alerts may be issued by the Ministry of Health following the review of at least one critical incident reported to the Ministry. A critical incident is defined as a serious adverse health event including, but not limited to, the actual or potential loss of life, limb or function related to a health service or a program operated by the Saskatchewan Health Authority (SHA), the Saskatchewan Cancer Agency or a health care organization.

The purpose of a patient safety alert is to recommend actions that will improve the safety of patients who may be cared for under similar circumstances. Recommendations are intended to support the development of best practices and to act as a framework for improvement and can be adapted to fit the needs of the health service organization. When possible, policies or initiatives that have been developed by the SHA or the Saskatchewan Cancer Agency will be shared, to support adoption of policies or actions.

Patient Safety Alerts online: www.ehealthsask.ca/services/resources/Pages/Patient-Safety.aspx