

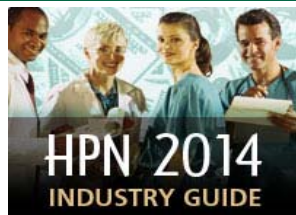
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Questions can be sent to: [jakridge@hpnonline.com](mailto:jakridge@hpnonline.com)  
 called in to **Jeannie Akridge at HPN:(941) 927-9345 ext.202** or mailed to:  
**HPN CS Questions, 2477 Stickney Point Road, Suite 315B, Sarasota, FL 34231**  
 Names and hospital identification will be withheld upon request.



### Chemical temperatures, Unbearable conditions, C. diff

by Ray Taurasi

**Q** I am confused and concerned about a perceived conflict in professional recommendations regarding the temperature range for the decontamination area and the temperature for which disinfectants used in decontamination must be maintained at. As I understand it the temperature in the decontamination area should be between 60 - 65° F, however chemicals that we frequently use in

this area such as, Cidex -OPA and Revital-Ox require a minimum temperature of 68° F. When compliant with one recommendation we are non-compliant with the other. How can I deal with such a dilemma?

**A** Room temperature and the temperature of surfaces in the area and or solutions in use in all likelihood are not the same. You might even find room temperature variations in an area e.g. spots closer to processing equipment might be warmer due to the heat produced by the machine's operation, hot water temperatures and the like. For starters, you will want to be sure to assess and monitor the actual temperatures of the solutions in use. If you indeed find that temperatures are below the manufacturers minimum temperature requirements, you may want to consider using a disinfectant warmer that will safely warm and maintain the chemical's temperature.

You should never attempt to heat any chemicals by any other means other than the use of an approved warmer. Automated processing machines used for washing and disinfecting heat sensitive and specialty devices have appropriate temperature program cycle settings for disinfectants. As with any of your manual cleaning processes, you will need to continuously monitor the temperature of chemicals in bath vessels and manual soaking bins.

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**Q** I read your column in the July issue of *Healthcare Purchasing News* regarding room temperatures and the use of fans in the sterile processing department. We don't use fans but we do follow AAMI recommendations for maintaining temperature ranges in the various work areas of SPD. The summer months do present a greater challenge for maintaining staff comfort. It is very challenging to maintain conditions that can meet the comfort level for everyone. It seems someone is always too hot or too cold.

**A** The decontamination area always seems to generate the most employee complaints of being too hot even when the temperature is at the lowest temperature range but there a few decontamination folks that feel it's a bit too cool at times. Last week a formal grievance was filed by a group of workers regarding the "unbearable" hot working conditions. I am at wits end and don't know what more I can do. Do you have any suggestions?

The decontamination area is frequently an area where achieving and maintaining employee's comfort is a challenge. All of the PPE worn in conjunction with the heat produced by the automated processing equipment and the physical work all increase body temperatures and personal comfort levels. Some suggestions I might offer are:

- Have engineering do an assessment of the HVAC system for the decontamination area as well as other areas in question to confirm that all is working properly and effectively
- For the few that claim to be too cool appropriate warm up attire can be used
- Assess the use of PPE in your area – I often note that many decontamination areas have dress codes that are overkill. For example, everyone is required to wear full body PPE at all times (e.g. face shields, goggles, masks, boot covers, plastic leggings, hoods, heavy protective sleeve gloves, plastic aprons over jump suits, etc). OSHA requirements call for the use of PPE which is appropriate to specific job risk factors. Not all tasks in decontamination present the same depth or likelihood of exposure risks. Eliminating unnecessary PPE could result in greater employee comfort.
- The use of cooling apparel is becoming quite popular in SPD and in the OR which has proven to be quite effective. Various garments are available such as caps, scarfs, and vests (see figure 1). The garments are worn under the PPE and some contain cooling gel packs while others are just dampened with cool water which produces a cooling affect for hours. You may have seen similar devices used on the athletic field or at your gym.



Figure 1

**Q** Having recently graduated from a CS course I have started my first job in sterile processing and I am very excited. Every day I realized there is always something new to learn. There has been lots of discussion about CD and how bad it is. I know that it is some sort of a serious infection that is easily spread from patient to patient but I would like to know more about it and what we need to know or do in SPS.

**A** CD stands for *Clostridium difficile* often referred to as *C. diff* or *Clostridium difficile* infection (CDI). It is a serious illness caused by *C. difficile* bacteria which attacks and infects the lining of the colon. Symptoms of *C. diff* include fever, painful, severe diarrhea and, in serious cases can lead to death. Patients at highest risk of acquiring CDI are those with a compromised immune system, debilitated patients and those typically taking a broad spectrum antibiotics, that can disturb the balance of the naturally occurring bacteria in the digestive tract

and colon, which in turn allows *C. difficile* to flourish and produce toxins that cause the severe diarrhea.

CDI is very difficult to eliminate and can transmit easily from patient to patient via the hands of healthcare workers and from contaminated surfaces and equipment. In its spore form it is resistant to almost all disinfection methodologies other than those designed for high level disinfection or sterilization. CDI has become the most common form of hospital acquired diarrhea. The increased proliferation of CDI in the healthcare setting has produced more resistant strains of the bacteria. It is important that sterile processing personnel understand the critical nature of CDI and follow appropriate personal hygiene and hand washing protocols. Following proper procedures for the care, handling, decontamination and reprocessing of medical devices and equipment is essential to minimizing the potential for cross contamination. **HPN**

*Ray Taurasi is Eastern Regional Director of Clinical Sales and Services for [Healthmark Industries](#). His healthcare career spans over three decades as an Administrator, Educator, Technologist and Consultant. He is a member of AORN, AHA, SGNA, AAMI and a past president of IAHCSSM and has served on and contributed to many national committees with a myriad of professional organizations, manufacturers, corporations and prestigious healthcare networks. Taurasi has been a faculty member of numerous colleges teaching in the divisions of business administration and health sciences. In addition to this column he has authored several articles and has been a featured speaker on the international scene.*

