

Antimicrobial Dressings Support the Fight Against COVID in LTC Facilities



COVID-19 has hit Long-Term Care (LTC) facilities hard. While these facilities have accounted for only 9% of cases in the United States, 42% of pandemic-related fatalities fall under the LTC umbrella.¹ At the same time, not every LTC is the same. Analysts from the National Investment Center for Seniors Housing and Care (NIC) identified a 1.5% positivity rate in assisted living facility COVID-19 tests,² while nursing home managers saw a rate almost 4.5 times as high for confirmed or suspected positive tests.



Featured expert:
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LTC wound care has emerged as an area of particular concern for the spread of COVID-19. The CDC has highlighted the importance of wound care education and training³ for nursing homes whose residents tend to be elderly with compromised immune systems, multiple comorbidities, and more likely to be on immunosuppressing drugs. In response, many LTC leaders and clinicians are leveraging the benefits of antimicrobial dressings (AMD) to help manage the impact of the pandemic in LTC settings.



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Understanding Antimicrobial Dressings

Although there is no conclusive evidence⁴ that COVID-19 can spread through open wounds, wound care is still central to broader infection control and therefore to the pandemic disease management in skilled nursing facilities, nursing homes, and adult living facilities.

AMDs are a diverse class of dressings that go a step beyond ordinary sterile dressings. They help prevent infection by providing protection against contaminants and a range of infectious bacteria. This is accomplished through agents such as polyhexamethylene biguanide (PHMB)⁵ or ionic silver. These dressings have been formulated⁵ to be noncytotoxic and also include iodine-based preparations, along with silver-releasing agents and hydrophobic dressings.

PHMB: a Wound Care Powerhouse

PHMB⁵ is a polymer that exhibits both antimicrobial and antiviral properties. It is clinically proven to inhibit bacterial growth as a bacteria-killing polymer, offering the additional layer of protection that many clinicians are seeking in their response to COVID-19. Used in clinics, homes, and commercial applications, PHMB virtually eliminates bacteria both on and within the dressing, protecting the wound and limiting cross-contamination and promoting healing. Studies⁷ have indicated that there have been no reports of acquired resistance to PHMB when observing its actions and preference for microbial membrane disruption.

AMD's Role in Infection Control During COVID

The frequency with which LTC wound dressings need to be changed presents a particular challenge in care environments impacted by COVID-19. This is one area where AMDs provide a significant benefit over traditional sterile dressings, **with some AMD dressings maintaining efficacy for up to five to seven days.** AMD's longer wear time in comparison to traditional dressings supports infection control practices in the LTC environment by minimizing both clinician and patient exposure.

Barbara Abounader, RN, BHSA, Director, Clinical Operations Non Acute & Inside Sales Cardinal health recommends that LTC leadership begin leveraging AMDs as a part of a continually evolving approach to infection control and wound care. This is particularly important, she emphasizes, as our understanding of the virus is still developing as data emerges and new means of infection are identified. For example, there's new evidence⁸ that suggests that the coronavirus could potentially be found in fecal matter.

"At this point in the pandemic, LTC leadership will benefit from having already examined their infection control policies and procedures — reevaluating them to implement COVID-19-specific protocols around everything from PPE to general infection control practices, hand-washing, staff training, and visitor policies. They should even consider establishing a segregated population for high risk or infected patients."

She recommends sticking close to trusted sources and agencies for reliable information in building a COVID-19-ready response — for example, webinars, checklists, and general information from the CDC, and McKnight's Long Term Care News, but also wound care agencies and industry-leading continuing education.

She stresses though, that this is an ongoing process. "It's critical that LTC leadership and staff not get complacent or let themselves become stagnant. **The key to responding to COVID-19 in an effective way will rely on comprehensive and ongoing self, as well as staff, education.**"

To learn more about your LTC wound care options and how to leverage antimicrobial dressings to better address COVID-19 concerns, we invite you to review our most up-to-date information on skin and wound management **here.**

SOURCES:

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