

Hand sanitation in an animal shelter

Hand sanitation is an integral part of proper biosecurity, but it can quickly become overwhelming. Dr. Ellis explains when hands should be cleaned mechanically and when hand sanitizer is more than enough.

Question:

Hi there,

I am currently working in a shelter and we are looking into finding a hand cleanser that will kill parvovirus. I have reached out to a few companies to see if they have anything commercially available, but without success. Do you have any recommendations or products that you are using?

Thanks in advance,

Answer:

Hi,

Thanks for reaching out with your question. Unfortunately, to our knowledge, there is no hand sanitizer on the market that is effective against parvovirus. Studies have shown that even the [recently developed products](#) as well as products with [high alcohol content](#) are not effective in significantly reducing viral load. Some shelters have reported using Accelerated Hydrogen Peroxide (Rescue™) wipes when access to hand washing is unavailable and exposure to parvovirus or other unenveloped virus has occurred (e.g. on animal control vehicles, in areas of the shelter that are remote from sinks, etc.). Rescue has proven activity against parvovirus and has been labeled for use without gloves and so might become the best option in those specific cases.

However, that is not to say that hand sanitizers do not have their place in animal shelters!

Here are some good general guidelines regarding hand sanitizer in a shelter:

1. Hands do not need to be washed / sanitized between healthy members of a population
2. Hand sanitizer can be used between patients of unknown health status or other suspected health concerns.
 - Hand sanitizer should contain [at least 60% isopropyl alcohol](#)
3. Hands should be cleaned with soap and water (at least 20 seconds of mechanical cleaning) and completely dried if:
 - Hands are visibly dirty, soiled or greasy
 - Hands are contaminated with blood, feces or bodily fluids
 - Animal is suspect for infectious disease with hardy pathogen (e.g. parvovirus, ringworm, calicivirus).
 - Between different populations of animals (different wards, TNR vs. sheltered vs. owned animals, etc.)

As a rule of thumb, when interacting with patients who are suspect of infectious disease or of unknown health status, we recommend wearing gloves, as to reduce any potential fomite exposure but also to protect against any potential zoonotic disease. We also recommend that to staff and volunteers cleaning kennels, providing health care to reduce risk of contamination. Gloves, just like hands, can be hand-sanitized between patients as long as they are not ripped or soiled.

Hand sanitation is also important for human health protection. Hand sanitizers and/or hand washing stations should be available in all animal housing areas, and sanitizing hands after handling animals and before eating is recommended.

By targeting specific situations where hand sanitizing and hand washing are actually needed, we can improve staff and volunteer compliance and ensure that these practices are done when they matter most.

Alex Ellis, DVM
Maddie's Fund Shelter Medicine
Resident
Shelter Medicine Program
University of Wisconsin – School of Veterinary Medicine
www.uwsheltermedicine.com
www.facebook.com/UWShelterMedicine

