



## Clinical update

# A proposed protocol for hand and table sanitizing in chiropractic clinics and education institutions

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### Abstract

**Objective:** By nature, chiropractic is a hands-on profession using manipulation applied to the joints with direct skin-to-skin contacts. Chiropractic tables are designed with a face piece to accommodate the prone patient's head in a neutral position and hand rests to allow for relaxed shoulders and upper spine so treatment is facilitated. The purpose of this article is to present a proposed guideline for hand and treatment table surface sanitizing for the chiropractic profession that is evidence-based and can easily be adopted by teaching institutions and doctors in the field.

**Methods:** A review of the chiropractic literature demonstrated that pathogenic microbes are present on treatment tables in teaching clinics at multiple facilities, yet no standardized protocols exist in the United States regarding table sanitizing and hand hygiene in chiropractic clinics or education institutions. This article reviews the scientific literature on the subject by using several search engines, databases, and specific reviews of documents pertaining to the topic including existing general guidelines.

**Results:** The literature has several existing guidelines that the authors used to develop a proposed protocol for hand and table sanitizing specific to the chiropractic profession.

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Recommendations were developed and are presented on hand hygiene and table sanitizing procedures that could lower the risk of infection for both clinical personnel and patients in chiropractic facilities.

**Conclusion:** This article offers a protocol for hand and table sanitizing in chiropractic clinics and education institutions. The chiropractic profession should consider adoption of these or similar measures and disseminate them to teaching clinics, institutions, and private practitioners. © 2009 National University of Health Sciences.

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## Introduction

The chiropractic profession has grown to become one of the most frequent providers of non-allopathic care for a multitude of neuromusculoskeletal conditions including, but not limited to, low back, neck, and extremity conditions.<sup>1</sup> In addition, the chiropractic profession is traditionally a hands-on profession, treating a variety of conditions with manual manipulation of the spinal column and other joints.<sup>2</sup> By the very nature of the procedure, hand-to-patient contact is required. For many procedures the patient is placed prone on a treatment table with a special fitted headrest that has a face piece to accommodate the nose by providing a comfortable position for the patient. In addition, hand rests are also present on most treatment tables to allow positioning of the hands so the arms are relaxed for procedures directed at the spine.

According to cross-sectional studies, such as the National Health Interview Survey, approximately 10% of Americans are under the care of a doctor of chiropractic (DC) at a given time.<sup>3</sup> The demography of chiropractic patients is similar to that of the United States and crosses most social and economic categories, although minorities and lowest social and economic groups tend to seek out the care of a DC less frequently.<sup>4</sup>

Previous assessments of chiropractic treatment tables in teaching clinics, although few in number, have found pathogenic microbes and allergens on table surfaces.<sup>5-9</sup> Hand hygiene and proper surface sanitizing are known to reduce the spread of pathogenic microbes in health care settings as well as reduce the presence of surface pathogens on treatment tables.<sup>5,7,9-12</sup> The purpose of this article is to present a proposed guideline for hand and treatment table surface sanitizing for the chiropractic profession that is evidence-based and can easily be adopted by teaching institutions and doctors in the field.

## Methods

Databases such as Medline, Mantis, and CINAHL were reviewed along with the investigators' own article files for articles that assessed pathogens on chiropractic tables and on hand hygiene issues in chiropractic. Searches for existing guidelines on hand sanitizing/hand washing and table sanitization specific for chiropractic were made using the above databases and Google including Google Scholar. Search terms included *hand washing/hand hygiene, microbes and chiropractic, microbes and chiropractic treatment tables, pathogenic microbes and chiropractic treatment tables*, and such. In addition, specific guidelines from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other US government-based reports such as the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, along with guidelines from other countries, were reviewed when they existed specific to the chiropractic profession. These guidelines were found by searching those specific web sites mentioned and by reviewing searches derived from Google's search engines. The findings are summarized below with recommendations for a national protocol on table and hand sanitizing in chiropractic offices and teaching institutions.

## Results

Our literature search found 4 articles published on microbial analysis of chiropractic treatment table surfaces<sup>5-8</sup>; 1 article on attitudes, beliefs, and current practices of students on hand hygiene and table sanitizing in chiropractic<sup>13</sup>; and 1 poster presentation on the attitudes, beliefs, and current practices presented at the American Public Health Association's Conference in 2007.<sup>14</sup> In addition, one presentation at the 2008 Association of Chiropractic College's Research Agenda Conference was made on the topic of microbes on treatment tables along with a successful surveillance

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