



# Practice Briefs

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## What is a “splash zone” and what is the guidance associated with it?

A splash zone is an area around a sink in which contamination could occur, to objects within that space, from the splash associated with handwashing or other activity being done in the sink. Splashing can occur up to about 3 feet from the sink. A more rigorous hand wash could potentially distribute droplets farther, but for purposes of surveying healthcare facilities, CMS uses 3 feet as their guide.

The survey form from CMS holds the following direction:

Medications should not be prepared near areas of splashing water (e.g. within 3 feet of a sink). Alternately when space is limited, a splash guard can be mounted beside the sink<sup>1</sup>.

There have been outbreaks associated with preparation of medication close to sinks. One such outbreak was reported in the following publication, *Outbreak of Mycobacterium mucogenicum Bloodstream Infections Among Patients with Sickle Cell Disease in an Outpatient Setting*<sup>2</sup>.

Tap water from 2 sinks were implicated in the outbreak; a nurse in the clinic had prepared intravenous port flushes on the sink counter, using a saline bag that was hanging over the sink, throughout the shift, instead of using prefilled saline flushes. The same sink was also being used for hand washing.

Splash near sinks plays a part in contaminating nearby medical supplies/equipment. Therefore we recommend not to store anything within the splash zone of sinks.

### References:

1. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, Hospital Infection Control Worksheet (n.d.), retrieved September 08, 2017, from <https://www.cms.gov/Medicare/Provider-Enrollment-and-Certification/SurveyCertificationGenInfo/Downloads/Survey-and-Cert-Letter-15-12-Attachment-1.pdf>
2. Ashraf, M. S., Swinker, M., & Augustino, K. L., et al. (2012). Outbreak of *Mycobacterium mucogenicum* Bloodstream Infections among Patients with Sickle Cell Disease in an Outpatient Setting. *Infection Control & Hospital Epidemiology*, 33(11), 1132-1136.

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