

Hot and Cold Gel Pack Application Procedure

1. Purpose

The application of local heat/cold to muscles can assist in relaxation, comfort and provide some relief for aches and pains. The purpose of this procedure is to draw attention to the potential for injury to patients, when hot or cold packs are applied to the skin.

Cold therapy is recommended for the first 48 hours of a musculoskeletal injury.

Heat should be applied only **after** the first 48 hours of the initial injury in patients with musculoskeletal injuries.

2. Procedure



- Hot packs are not to be heated using a microwave oven as they are unable to provide a consistent, known temperature.
- Hot packs are to be heated in a warming device set at 60° C. Not to be stored on metal racks.
- Do not apply to post operative wounds/incisions during acute stay.
- Physiotherapy department specific hot packs are outside the scope of this procedure.
- Hot and cold packs must be used with a cover and are not to be applied directly to the skin.
- Care is to be taken with the following patients who are at higher risk of injury:
 - Infants
 - Patients who have impaired consciousness, sensation, circulation or mobility
 - Older patients
 - Patients who have language or communication difficulties.

Application of hot and cold packs

- wash skin to remove liniment (if applicable)
- avoid medication patches
- test the temperature of the hot/cold pack, it should feel comfortable on the inner wrist.
- assess patient's skin for impaired circulation or sensation
- ensure that the patient can access the nurse call bell, instruct patient to remove the pack if it feels too hot/cold or causes discomfort and to call for assistance
- check the site where the pack is applied 3-5 minutes after initial application and continue regular checks thereafter
- therapy is generally recommended for a period of 20 minutes per treatment
- following use, ensure they are cleaned and disinfected before re-use with disinfection wipes (refer to the WACHS [Environmental Cleaning Policy](#))
- return to the warming device or freezer
- document outcome of therapy and site checks in patient's healthcare record

- complete a Datix Clinical Incident Management System ([Datix CIMS](#)) form if the patient's skin integrity is impaired and/or area remains red for greater than 20 minutes following the removal of the hot/cold pack
- inform patient/carer and document observations and patient/carer discussion in the healthcare record.

3. Roles and Responsibilities

All registered and enrolled nurses are required to practice in accordance with the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia codes and guidelines.

The National Decision-Making Framework facilitates nurse's clinical decision-making. It is the responsibility of each health care provider to ensure all patient care and therapeutic interventions they provide are within their individual scope of practice.

All Staff are required to work within policies and guidelines to make sure that WACHS is a safe, equitable and positive place to be.

4. Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring of compliance with this document is to be carried out annually by the evaluation of CIMS report and patient feedback systems.

5. References

- [Heat and Cold Packs \(CC046\) Swan Kalamunda Health Service](#)
- [Hot and Cold Gel Packs Rockingham Peel Group CMP Code AC136](#)
- [Australian Guidelines for the Prevention and Control of Infection in Healthcare \(2019\)](#)
(if link does not open in Internet Explorer, copy link and open in Chrome)

6. Definitions

Term	Definition
Heat / Cold Packs	Disposable gel-filled packs

7. Document Summary

Coverage	WACHS Great Southern
Audience	Clinical staff
Records Management	Clinical: Health Record Management Policy
Related Legislation	Nil
Related Mandatory Policies / Frameworks	Clinical Governance, Safety and Quality Policy Framework
Related WACHS Policy Documents	Environmental Cleaning Policy
Other Related Documents	Nil
Related Forms	Nil
Related Training	Nil
Aboriginal Health Impact Statement Declaration (ISD)	ISD Record ID: 5671
National Safety and Quality Health Service (NSQHS) Standards	1, 2, 3 and 5
Aged Care Quality Standards	5.4
Chief Psychiatrist's Standards for Clinical Care	N/A
Other Standards (please specify and include link)	Nil

8. Document Control

Version	Published date	Current from	Summary of changes
3.0	13 August 2026	13 August 2026	Formal review - Updated terminology - Updated alerts

9. Approval

Policy Owner	Executive Director Great Southern
Co-approver	Executive Director Medical Services
Contact	Director of Nursing Midwifery, Albany Health Campus
Business Unit	Nursing and Midwifery
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Appendix A: Hot Pack Standard Operating Procedure (SOP)

Hot Pack SOP

