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Orangeburg wipe maker helps keep deadly bacteria's spread at bay

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ORANGEBURG - The 600 employees working in Nice-Pak Products Inc.'s plant here are busy these days churning out all manner of disinfecting-wipe products for use in homes, hospitals and other institutions.

Business has doubled during the last five years, the company said, in part because of concern about MRSA, the drug-resistant strain of staph bacteria that recently affected some Lower Hudson Valley residents, including several students at area schools.

The bacteria, in its invasive form, is responsible for some 19,000 hospital deaths each year, according to the Journal of the American Medical Association. A third of those infections occur while patients are hospitalized.

To reduce the spread of MRSA and other bacteria, the nation's No. 1 supplier of wipe products to hospitals is increasing the information and educational tools it provides to its customers about effectively cleaning hands and surfaces, said Joann Reilly, director of marketing for Nice-Pak's Professional Disposables International division, known as PDI.

Educating users about the proper use of the products is part of the company's mission, Reilly said. Though their products and their use may seem simple, hospital staff still need training.

One example is the company's Chlorascrub product, a federally approved over-the-counter drug in either pad or swab forms that has been shown to reduce the number of deaths caused by staph infections among patients while hospitalized, Reilly said.

"What the product provides over alcohol and iodine is that its disinfecting qualities last for 24 hours, reducing possible post-operative infections," she said.

Another example is Nice-Pak's Super Sani-Cloth and Sani-Cloth Plus products that kill the MRSA bacteria on surfaces, where it can live for more than seven weeks, in as little as 2 minutes.

Reducing in-hospital infections is increasingly important to hospitals and other health-care facilities in light of new regulations issued by the federal Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services.

How to prevent staph or MRSA skin infections

Practice good hygiene:

- Keep your hands clean by washing thoroughly with soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Keep cuts and scrapes clean and covered with a bandage until healed.
- Avoid contact with other people's wounds or bandages.
- Avoid sharing personal items such as towels or razors.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

The new rules, to take effect next October, limit the amount Medicare will reimburse hospitals for certain conditions.

"Four of them are related to infection control," said Leslie Mauchline, infection control coordinator at Nyack Hospital.

As part of its effort to help hospitals combat bacteria that come into hospitals from patients and visitors, Nice-Pak recently introduced a line of stands, which stand freely or can be mounted on a wall, for dispensing sanitizing wipes virtually anywhere.

Hudson Valley Hospital Center in Cortlandt has deployed similar hand-hygiene stands, supplied by a competitor of Nice-Pak, in its visiting areas.

The stands, along with posters by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on proper hand hygiene and treating staph infections, help to alleviate patient and visitor concern about the spread of MRSA, said Barbara Savatteri, Hudson Valley Hospital Center's director of infection control and employee health.

"We want to assure them that this is what they can do at home to prevent it," she said. "If they should have any concern about skin infection, then this is what they should look for, and they should seek medical attention."

Savatteri said Hudson Valley Hospital Center hasn't seen an increase in MRSA-related infections.

The use of hand-sanitation stands aren't limited to use by hospitals. Supermarkets also use them to help reduce the amount of bacteria spread through use of carts.

In addition to institutions and businesses, Nice-Pak also sells indirectly to consumers, manufacturing many of the private-label wipe products sold in big-box retailers. The company also sells its own wide-ranging brand of wipe products including Sani-Hands, Bathroom Buddies and I Go! brands of wipes for toddlers.

Wipes are the company's only business.

"Our focus is on wipes," said Michael S. Sarno, executive vice president of North America operations. "At the end of the day, it's all we make."

Nice-Pak got its start 50 years ago making premoistened towelettes for the Kentucky Fried Chicken franchise. The familiar Wet-Nap name has been joined by dozens of others that include familiar pharmaceutical-grade brand-name products in wipe form or that have a wipe as part of the packaging.

One example is Preparation H, a hemorrhoid treatment made by pharmaceutical-giant Wyeth. The New Jersey-based drug company relies on Nice-Pak to make Preparation H brand moist towelettes that are marketed alongside suppositories and ointments.

Wyeth is just one of several drug makers, others include Johnson & Johnson, Merck & Co. and Pfizer Inc., for which Nice-Pak makes wipe products.

Nice-Pak has been able to get such lucrative agreements in large measure because its three U.S. plants comply with U.S. Food & Drug Administration production requirements, Sarno said.

FDA rules extend to such things heating-and-ventilation systems and proper "gowning" procedures for employees, that include the use of hair nets and protective eyewear.

When big pharmaceutical companies tour Nice-Pak facilities and see how there are run, "They come in and say, 'Oh, you get it,' Sarno said.

In addition to Orangeburg, Nice-Pak has plants in Green Bay, Wis., and Mooresville, Ind., as well as in the United Kingdom and Germany.

Among other initiatives, Nice-Pak is also undertaking an educational-marketing program aimed at kids to show them how to properly clean hands using a wipe.

"More than 90 percent of school-age children wash their hands for less than 5 seconds," said Matt Schiering, vice president of marketing for Nice-Pak's branded consumer-products division. "In a school setting, that's not an effective way to eliminate bacteria," he said.

The campaign uses two cartoon characters, a girl and a boy named Cora and Cory, and includes books, published in partnership with children's book-publisher Scholastic, and videos. For school events and special promotions, the company uses actors, donned in Cora and Cory outfits, to get its message across.

That campaign is just one part of the company's larger effort to educate the public about proper hand hygiene.

"We're starting to be viewed as a resource," Reilly said. "Not just as a company that sells products, but as a true health-care partner."
