

Colonic irrigation

Client health information

In Victoria there is currently no provision in the *Health Act 1958* requiring colonic irrigation businesses to be registered by local government. This fact sheet has been produced to allow those considering colonic irrigation to make an informed decision about the process.

Colonic irrigation (also known as colonics, colonic lavage, colon irrigation, high colonic or colon hydrotherapy) is the practice of cleansing the colon using filtered and temperature regulated water via a rectal catheter.

If equipment is not sterile and infection control procedures are not followed there is the potential for a range of bowel infections to be transmitted, including hepatitis A, as well as blood borne viruses such as hepatitis B and C, and HIV. There is also potential for serious injury.

The procedure

The first stage of the colonic irrigation procedure involves massage of the lower abdominal area. A sterile single use catheter is then gently inserted into the rectum by either the operator or the client. Filtered and temperature regulated warm water, and occasionally herbs or oxygen (ozone therapy), is gradually introduced into the colon and natural evacuation of faeces occurs. **If you have any allergies you should let the operator know before the introduction of additives.**

Risks

People with acute or chronic illnesses, who are suffering from diarrhoea, or who are immunocompromised should seek medical advice prior to undertaking any colonic irrigation procedure.

Potential risks for any client include:

- Infection due to unsterile equipment that permits backflow of faecal material to the water system.
- Injury to the colon, such as ulceration or perforation.
- Exacerbation of chronic bowel disease such as diverticulitis, Crohn's Disease or haemorrhoids.
- Scalding if water temperature regulating controls fail.

- Reduced capacity to control bowel movements for a period of time after the procedure.
- Removal of normal intestinal flora may lead to gastrointestinal infections.

If you develop an infection, feel weak, or have any other unusual symptoms following therapy, stop treatment and check with your doctor. You should also report these symptoms to the operator.

Operator requirements

Current best practice guidelines for colonic irrigation recommend:

The **procedure room** should:

- Be as hygienic as possible to avoid and protect both the client and operator from disease transmission.
- Have a hands-free basin with hot and cold running water supplied through a single outlet, liquid soap and paper towels.
- Have a toilet and shower for the exclusive use of the client located in the procedure room or as an ensuite.
- Have paper towel on the client couch.
- Have paper towel for each client to clean themselves after the irrigation procedure.
- The clinic should provide clean and comfortable facilities for you to change. Clean gowns, robes and towels should be provided.
- Care should be taken that the systems tubing does not become blocked during the procedure.
- A water-based lubricant in a single use sachet is recommended to assist catheter insertion. Single use gloves should be worn by the operator when assisting a client to insert a catheter and discarded immediately after use. If the client is positioning the catheter they should be provided with single use wipes.
- Water temperature must be regulated to normal body temperature to prevent thermal shock or scalding. The temperature of the water delivery should be between 34 and 40°C and should never exceed 40°C. Normal body temperature should be the guide and this is 37.6°C. If you have concerns about the temperature of the water before or during the procedure, you

should discuss this with the operator.

- The controls should be placed so that clients are unable to alter settings once the procedure commences.
- Operators should have clean clothes and no exposed cuts, abrasions or wounds. Hands must be washed and thoroughly dried immediately before putting on new gloves before the procedure and on completion of the procedure.
- Colonic irrigation **equipment** should have an Australian Register of Therapeutic Goods (ARTG) inclusion number. Policies and procedures for safe operation should be in place, and the manufacturers' instructions, including maintenance, strictly followed.
- **Under no circumstances should the colonic irrigation equipment be connected directly to a potable (drinking) water supply system.** A direct connection could result in (a) a serious (and possibly fatal) injury to a client due to application of mains pressure; and (b) under abnormal conditions such as a sudden drop in mains pressure, the potable water supply could become contaminated with faecal matter.
- The tubing and catheters used in this process should be single use only.
- If you have any concerns about the equipment or policies and procedures you should discuss this with the operator before commencing with the treatment.

For further information contact your local council health department or the Communicable Disease Control Unit of the Department of Human Services on 1300 651 160.

www.health.vic.gov.au/ideas

NB: The provision of this fact sheet on colonic irrigation, should not be construed to imply that the Department of Human Services in any way recommends this procedure for the purpose of better health.

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