

Tackling the complex challenges of hygiene together
The Association for Applied Hygiene (VAH e.V.)
celebrates its 20th anniversary



Bonn, 7 September 2023 – During the COVID 19 pandemic, the term „hygiene“ became popular and present in all media throughout the world. However, appropriateness, quality and correct implementation of hygiene measures were not always ensured. The complexity of hygiene has been and still is often underestimated. Hygiene interventions require a holistic and interdisciplinary approach. This insight is reflected in the founding idea of the Association of Applied Hygiene (Verbund für Angewandte Hygiene, VAH): Bringing all expertise in the field of hygiene together for achieving a science-based, but practice-oriented approach to hygiene-related issues which can successfully promote and protect health. During the pandemic this vision and approach have proven effective. What is most important to VAH today, 20 years after it was founded?

The VAH Disinfectant List

Dr. Jürgen Gebel, Managing Director of the VAH Head Office, underlines the importance of the VAH certification procedure and the publication of VAH-certified products in the VAH Disinfectant List. Irrespective of various trends in industry and politics, VAH has and will continue to rely on the quality of efficacy tests for disinfection procedures to ensure the highest possible safety level for infection prevention. The methods and requirements for certification are continuously adapted to the state of the art and are also included in European standardization. The Commission for Hospital Hygiene and Infection Prevention (KRINKO) at the German Robert Koch Institute has recently issued a [statement](#) on the requirements for disinfectants for use in infection-sensitive areas which explicitly do not only include medical facilities, confirming the relevance of such a certification procedure – for **all activity spectrums** of disinfectant products, including efficacy against viruses and spores.

Developing holistic prevention strategies

At the same time VAH takes into consideration aspects of toxicity for humans and the environment, novel technologies, or demands for ecological and also economic sustainability in the procurement and application of disinfection and other non-pharmaceutical infection control measures. The focused scientific and interdisciplinary discussions with specialists from the natural sciences along with those from individual and population-based medicine allow answers on the basis of a broad consensus. These include strict and differentiated indications for the use of specific disinfection procedures according to a professional risk assessment and an optimization in application techniques. It also involves, says **Professor Martin Exner** in a publication commemorating the 20th anniversary of VAH, the constant questioning and possibly revision of what has long been established as the status quo in view of new epidemiological challenges or new scientific findings.

Putting theoretical knowledge into practice

VAH also devotes itself in detail to practical questions from users from medical and non-medical fields in addition to addressing current infectiological topics. VAH representatives participate, organize and chair workshops and sessions of various panels, including national and European standardization committees. On one hand, this allows VAH to stimulate important innovative product developments, application techniques and test methods. On the other hand, in-depth practical insights prove valuable for educating and training both consumers and professional users.

Optimizing and validating efficacy test methods

The VAH Reference Laboratory regularly organizes round robin tests to validate test methods, it optimizes already existing methods for efficacy testing and develops innovative, application-related methodological approaches to address pressing research questions. Furthermore, post-market surveillance of disinfectants by retesting them in

the VAH reference laboratory is part of the external quality assurance system, which benefits infection control and provides safety for users.

Taking an international and interdisciplinary stance

According to VAH Chairman, Professor Lutz Vossebein, handling the complexity of hygiene-related issues requires the involvement of experts from various institutions. With the multi-faceted and high level of expertise of these specialists, the VAH is well prepared for future challenges. At the same time it is important to constantly stay abreast of current developments with respect to hygiene practices and the dynamics in infectious disease epidemiology.

Emerging challenges will encompass pandemics, particularly those caused by viral pathogens, and other crisis scenarios. In addition, antibiotic resistance and interactions of disinfectant active substances with pathogens, humans, animals and the environment must be taken into consideration. Novel materials and designs for porous and non-porous surfaces and medical devices should also be taken into account. Testing of innovative technologies for decontamination and disinfection, quality control of one-step disinfectant cleaners, occupational health and safety topics, process control and surveillance, possibly incorporating artificial intelligence, sustainability issues and One Health aspects should also be addressed.

The **consolidation of expertise from all disciplines of applied hygiene under one roof** is crucial. In the coming years, VAH will aim to enhance its international orientation and expand the interdisciplinary scope even further, in the firm belief that good hygiene practice is indispensable for the wellbeing of us and our planet.

To mark the 20th anniversary, the journal Hygiene&Medizin has released a VAH focus issue in September. Additionally, a VAH session is scheduled for next year as part of the annual congress of the German Society for Hospital Hygiene (DGKH).

Carola Ilchner

Press contacts

Prof. Dr. Lutz Vossebein, VAH Chairman

Prof. em. Dr. med. Martin Exner, Chairman of the VAH Disinfectant Committee

Dr. Jürgen Gebel, Managing Director of the VAH Head Office and Secretary of the VAH Disinfectant Committee

VAH contact

Verbund für Angewandte Hygiene (VAH) e.V.

c/o Institut für Hygiene und Öffentliche Gesundheit

der Universitätsklinik Bonn

Venusberg-Campus 1

53127 Bonn, Germany

E-Mail: info@vah-online.de

Website (English): <https://vah-online.de/en/>

Phone: +49 228 2871 4022

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