
ACT Coated Fabric Selection Guide for Healthcare Upholstered Seating

Introduction

The purpose of this guide is to provide specifiers/interior designers with a tool that will help them select appropriate coated fabrics for upholstered seating in healthcare interiors. This tool is intended to facilitate communication between specifiers, end-users, coated fabric suppliers, and upholstered furniture suppliers. Due to multiple factors associated with real-world scenarios, laboratory testing alone may not predict actual field performance. The following will assist you in evaluating a coated fabric's suitability for a specific healthcare environment.

1. Durability and Performance Basics

When selecting coated fabrics for upholstery, it is essential to understand the unique demands the fabric will encounter during its use and lifetime. Assessing durability and appearance retention in a healthcare environment requires consideration of multiple factors beyond abrasion resistance.* ACT recommends that you:

- Identify the location where the furniture will be placed within the facility and determine the end-user's and client stakeholder's expectations for durability, appearance retention, and lifespan (e.g., waiting area, patient room, nurses' station, atrium, cafeteria).
- Identify the renovation cycle review process, schedule, and budget for replacement of upholsteries and/or furniture.
- Verify that the coated fabric meets or exceeds the ACT Voluntary Performance Guidelines minimum requirements for high-traffic public spaces. (See Coated Fabric Testing Guide – Part 1, all Sections)

**Disclaimer: Wyzenbeek test results are not necessarily a reliable indicator of fabric lifespan. Comparative laboratory testing results on the same textiles frequently differ and testing methods do not necessarily correlate well with the variables encountered in actual use by the end-user. Licensees using the ACT performance certification marks and publishing test results are required, at a minimum, to provide in their sampling, marketing materials and Website, the following statement:*

Abrasion test results exceeding ACT Performance Guidelines are not an indicator of product lifespan. Multiple factors affect fabric durability and appearance retention.

2. Facility-Specific Cleaning, Sanitizing and Disinfecting

The most rigorous demand on the coated fabric will be frequent cleaning, sanitizing, and disinfecting protocols used by the facility's environmental services team to comply with Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) requirements. Cleaning, sanitizing, and disinfecting are not the same. Products that are used for soil and stain removal may not be effective disinfectants or sanitizers; conversely, products that disinfect or sanitize may not be effective for soil and stain removal. CDC guidelines recommend that surfaces be clean of soil and debris before sanitizing or disinfecting.

Coated fabrics such as vinyl, polyurethane and silicone that are smooth and non-permeable can be suitable upholstery options; however, it should be noted that they are soft-surface materials and may be adversely affected by some hard-surface cleaners, sanitizers and disinfectants. Additionally, environmental services technicians typically do not adhere to manufacturers' instructions to rinse off these chemicals because of their facility's required protocols in specific patient care areas and/or limited time for completion of cleaning, sanitizing and disinfecting.

To help make the best selection for your project, ACT recommends the following:

- Review the facility environmental services, epidemiology, infection control, industrial hygiene, quality assurance and/or nursing departments' requirements for all applicable cleaning, sanitizing, and disinfecting protocols. To mitigate product failure, verify that the recommended cleaning, sanitizing, and disinfecting instructions provided by the coated fabric supplier and furniture manufacturer are in alignment with the facility's protocols and requirements.
- Identify specific cleaning, sanitizing, and disinfecting products that the facility will use on upholstered seating in each defined area. Ask the coated fabric supplier for a Product Technical Bulletin showing lab-tested cleaners, sanitizers, and disinfectants. Confirm that the cleaner, sanitizer or disinfectant is chemically compatible with the coated fabric when used in strict adherence to the chemical manufacturer's and fabric supplier's instructions. Ensure that these instructions are not in conflict with the facility's environmental services and epidemiology protocols. Cleaners, sanitizers, and disinfectants formulated for use on hard surfaces are not intended for use on soft surfaces and could damage vinyl, polyurethane and silicone upholstery fabrics; however, they may be required to be used in specific areas of the facility. (See Coated Fabric Testing Guide – Part 2, Section 2.1)
- Determine if the facility is using other methods for disinfecting (e.g., mist/vapor systems, UVC radiation). If so, special testing may be required. (See Coated Fabric Testing Guide – Part 2, Section 2.2)
- Identify the most likely types of stains that will occur based on furniture location and care population. In addition to body fluids, and chemicals used in medical treatments, stains and other adverse effects can be caused by substances such as hair- and skin-care moisturizing products, cosmetics, suntan lotion, hand sanitizers, nail polish, fragrances, food and beverages. Review the coated fabric supplier's instructions to determine if and how these stains can be removed without damaging the upholstery material. Remember: sanitizers and disinfectants may not prove to be effective for the removal of stains and soiling. (See Coated Fabric Testing Guide – Part 3, all Sections)

- Denim dye transfer can present a particularly challenging problem. Determine if the coated fabric has sufficient dye transfer resistance or is dye transfer cleanable. If not, choose a dark color that will help mask the dye transfer. (See Coated Fabric Testing Guide – Part 3, Section 3.1.1)
- Recommend that the end-user/facility conduct field testing and/or mock-ups in those areas where the material will be subjected to the facility's standard cleaning, sanitizing and disinfecting protocols and other environmental conditions. (See Coated Fabric Testing Guide – Part 4)

3. Furniture Design and Manufacturing

There can be significant differences in physical properties within and between the types of coated fabrics (e.g., vinyl, polyurethane and silicone). It is important to have a discussion with the furniture manufacturer regarding the selected coated fabric. To help make the best selection for your project, ACT recommends the following:

- Review the furniture construction, style, design features, modularity/replaceability of parts and upholstery details (e.g., sharp corners, foam properties, welting, seam type, fastening methods) for potential upholstery wear and appearance retention issues.
- Confirm that the specified coated fabric has been approved for the selected furniture by the furniture manufacturer. If using a Customer's Own Material (COM), note that additional time may be required for approval testing and special handling.
- Carefully review furniture and coated fabric warranties.

4. Material Ingredients/Chemicals Transparency

When selecting fabrics, you may need to factor in the individual facility's priorities for addressing sustainability, environmental issues, and the possible risk related to exposure to certain chemicals. A decision to voluntarily comply with material ingredient criteria in certification programs such as LEED[®], WELL Building Standard, Healthier Hospital Initiative, Practice Greenhealth, Healthcare Without Harm, Green Globes[®] and Living Building Challenge[®] may limit fabric choices. Environmental considerations should be balanced with fabric performance requirements.

- Determine if the facility is seeking a certification.
- Determine if material criteria, certification, material ingredient list or other protocol is required. Ask the supplier to provide documentation that their product meets the requirements.
- If the coated fabric meets material ingredient criteria in a certification program, confirm that it also complies with field durability requirements, including the fabric's ability to withstand the cleaners, sanitizers, and disinfectants being used in that facility as well as performance criteria identified in the Owner's Project Requirements (OPR).

5. Whom to Contact for Information

Coated Fabric Supplier

- General information on suitable end-uses for the coated fabric
- Relevant coated fabric test results
- Recommended maintenance, lab-tested cleaners/sanitizers/disinfectants and their usage protocols

Furniture Manufacturer

- Coated fabric's suitability for application on specific product
- Customer's Own Material (COM) approval

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- ACT Voluntary Performance Guidelines
- ACT Coated Fabric Testing Guide for Healthcare Upholstered Seating
- Technical white papers and textile tutorials
 - Abrasion Resistance: Considerations for Specifiers
 - ACT Voluntary Performance Guideline Tutorial



DISCLAIMER:

This ACT Coated Fabric Selection Guide (“Selection Guide”) has been prepared by the Association for Contract Textiles, Inc. (“ACT”) to provide specifiers and end users with a tool to help identify and assess commercial textile products for healthcare upholstered seating. It is intended that the Selection Guide be used in conjunction with the applicable ACT Voluntary Performance Guidelines (“Guidelines”).

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