

Manual: DENTAL REPROCESSING SERVICES
Subject: Unloading of Steriliser

Ref. No: C 11
Issue Date: January 2008
1st Review: April 2010
2nd Review: April 2016
Review due: April 2018
Page: 1 of 3

PURPOSE AND SCOPE

To ensure that staff working in the dental practice are aware of the correct unloading techniques.

BACKGROUND

Directly after the sterilising process items are very vulnerable to contamination by moisture or improper handling.

STEAM STERILISERS PRINCIPALS

1. General

A number of variables influence the sterilisation process, hence once complete, a number of checks must be made and the results recorded. Pressure, temperature and time must comply with the recommended values/limits. For readings outside specified limits, the sterilisation cycle must be regarded as unsatisfactory (regardless of chemical indicator results) and sterilising cycle repeated. If the second cycle is unsatisfactory, the steriliser must not be used until the problem has been rectified by an instrument technician.

Logs and electronic printouts must be retained for inspection and monitoring.

Older steam sterilisers (if in use) must, where possible, be fitted with mechanisms to electronically record sterilising parameters. If no such mechanism is available, parameters must be monitored and recorded manually or process indicators must be used for each cycle.

Dental practices must retain printouts and records from steam sterilisers for a period of seven years.

In addition to steriliser performance records, other records that must be retained include:

- (a) Results of performance test of equipment.
- (b) Employee training records.
- (c) Incident reports e.g. non-conforming products of workplace health and safety.
- (d) Quality and procedure/operational manuals.
- (e) Steriliser maintenance records.
- (f) Certification of validation.

2. Steam sterilisers with drying stage (prevac and downward displacement)

On completion of the drying stage, the load shall immediately be removed from the chamber and a visual inspection made to ascertain that the load is dry, packaging is intact, and that sterilising indicators have undergone the required colour change.

Directly after sterilisation care should be taken to avoid contamination by moisture or improper handling. The procedures below must be followed:

- (a) On removal of the load the operator shall check the printout to ensure the sterilisation parameters have been met. The operator will date and sign the designated record sheet to indicate that the required parameters have been met. If a failure of any parameter is detected, the designated person with responsibility for the dental practice sterilisation process and the manager of the practice must be notified.

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Page 2 of 3

- (b) Instrument packs must not be used if mechanical or chemical indicators indicate any flaws in the sterilising process.
- (c) Packaged and unpackaged items must never be dried by opening the door of the steriliser before drying cycle is complete.
- (d) Loading trays with cooling items must be kept away from high activity areas.
- (e) Forced cooling of items by fans, open doors or windows or boosted air-conditioning must not occur.
- (f) Cooling items must not be placed on solid surfaces as condensation may occur.
- (g) Items that are dropped on the floor, compressed, placed on a dirty surface, have torn packaging, broken seals or are wet, must be considered unsterile and must be reprocessed.
- (h) Where a steam steriliser with a drying stage has been used to sterilise an unwrapped load, appropriate handling procedures for unloading must be developed and documented by the dental practice.
- (i) Where plastic dust covers are used, the item must be cooled before being placed in the dust cover.

3. Steam sterilisers without drying stage (flash sterilisers).

Cycles without a drying stage must not be used to sterilise wrapped items.

Sterilisation of unwrapped critical items shall not be undertaken except in the case of an emergency or dropped/contaminated instrument. Such items must be used immediately upon cycle completion.

If an item is required to be flashed for immediate use the person removing from the steriliser shall be scrubbed. That is wearing a surgical mask, gown and sterile gloves.

To avoid contamination and thermal injury in units without a drying cycle, allow unwrapped instruments to dry and cool in the steriliser before they are handled.

Procedures for unloading of sterilisers containing unwrapped items must be developed and documented by the dental practice.

4. Monitoring of the Unloading Procedure

Procedures for unloading each type of steriliser must be developed and documented, and ongoing compliance with such procedures must be monitored.

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1st Review: April 2010
2nd Review: April 2016
Review due: April 2018
Page 3 of 3

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