

Check this template against your local regulations and your own policies before you use it.

SOP no.		Version		Effective date	
Owner		Approver		Review date	

Purpose

To make sure every reusable dental instrument is cleaned, sterilized and stored in the same validated way before it's used on a patient, and that each one can be traced to the cycle that sterilized it.

Scope

All reusable instruments and handpieces used on patients, from the end of the procedure to storage. It applies to every dental assistant, hygienist, dentist and sterilization assistant who handles used instruments.

Responsibilities

Role	Responsibility
Dental assistant or sterilization assistant	Carries out each step, checks every cycle and indicator, and records the load in the sterilization log.
Infection control lead	Trains staff, checks the logs and test results weekly, and leads the response to a failed cycle.
Practice owner	Makes sure the equipment is validated and serviced, and that the procedure follows current guidelines.

Definitions

Reprocessing: Everything that makes a used instrument safe to use again, from cleaning to sterilizing and storage.

Chemical indicator: A strip or ink that changes color when exposed to the conditions of a sterilizer cycle.

Biological indicator: A test containing bacterial spores, used periodically to show the sterilizer actually kills them.

What you need

- Heavy-duty gloves, mask, eye protection and a fluid-resistant gown
- A lidded, puncture-resistant transport container
- Ultrasonic cleaner or washer-disinfector, detergent and brushes
- Pouches or wraps, chemical indicators and a labeler
- A validated sterilizer and the sterilization log

Procedure

1. Prepare instruments at the chair

Wipe off visible debris at the chair, remove sharps into the sharps container, and keep instruments moist if they can't be cleaned soon, as your guidelines advise.

2. Carry them to the sterilization area

Put used instruments in a lidded, puncture-resistant container and carry them to the dirty zone of the sterilization area. Never carry loose instruments.

3. Put on protective equipment

Wear heavy-duty gloves, a mask, eye protection and a gown for every step in the dirty zone.

Caution: Handle sharp instruments with care, and never reach into a container of instruments with your hands. Report any sharps injury straight away.

4. Clean the instruments

Clean in an ultrasonic cleaner or washer-disinfector where possible, as its maker directs, and clean handpieces as their maker says. Hand-scrub only when needed, under water, with a long-handled brush.

5. Rinse, dry and inspect

Rinse and dry each instrument, then check it under good light, with magnification if you have it. Re-clean anything still dirty, and take damaged instruments out of use.

6. Package and label

Package instruments in pouches or wraps that suit the sterilizer, with a chemical indicator inside each pack. Label each pack with the date, sterilizer and cycle number.

7. Load and run the sterilizer

Load the sterilizer as its maker says, without overloading, and run the right cycle for the load.

8. Check the cycle and release the load

Check the printout or display shows the cycle reached its parameters, and that each pack's indicator has changed. Record the load in the sterilization log, then release it.

Caution: If a cycle fails or an indicator hasn't changed, don't release the load. Reprocess it and follow your failure procedure.

9. Store sterile packs

Store packs dry, closed and off the floor, in clean drawers or cupboards, and use the oldest first. Throw away or reprocess any pack that is torn, wet or dropped.

10. Test the sterilizer

Run the daily, weekly and periodic tests your guidelines and the maker require, such as air removal and spore tests, and record each result.

Records

- The sterilization log for every cycle, with printouts or data, kept for as long as your guidelines require.
- Sterilizer test results, including biological indicator tests.
- Sterilizer validation and service records.
- Staff training records for instrument reprocessing.

Related documents

- Dental instrument sterilization log
- Infection control policy
- Sharps injury procedure
- Sterilizer failure and recall procedure

Revision history

Version	Date	What changed	Approved by