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Maximize Efficiency While Maintaining Sterility During Instrument Processing and Organization

While most dental procedures do not require a sterile field, it is important to maintain the sterility of dental instruments until point of use. Proper instrument processing is more than just sterilization and comprises a seven-step process:

1. Transport
2. Cleaning
3. Packaging
4. Sterilization
5. Storage
6. Delivery
7. Quality


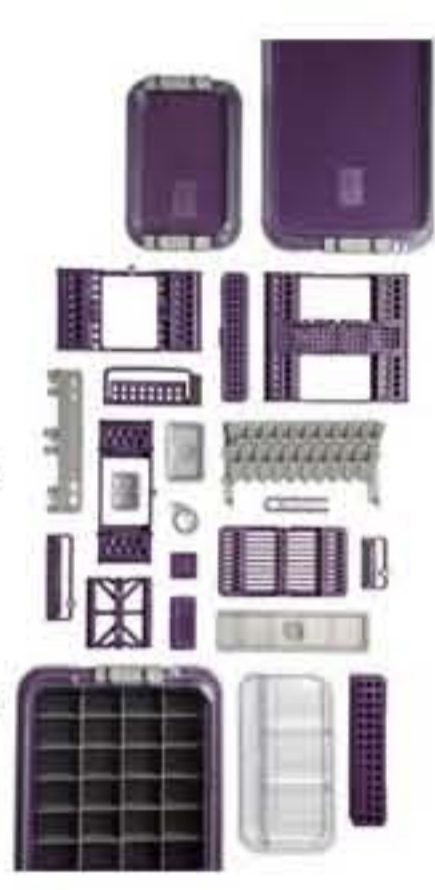


When oral health professionals **transport** contaminated instruments to the processing area, they must use a closed, rigid, leak-proof container, as opposed to transporting them on an open, used tray. If the practice uses an instrument management system that incorporates cassettes, then the cassette needs to be placed into the same type of closed, rigid, leak-proof container for transport, as cassettes have many openings that provide opportunity for injury.

The United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends automated **cleaning** as the next step in instrument processing. Although hand scrubbing is acceptable, it puts clinicians at risk for an occupational exposure injury. If instruments cannot be cleaned immediately, they can be immersed in a bin containing a holding solution.

Packaging instruments must then be completed in the clean area of the sterilization room. All critical and semi-critical items that must be sterilized will be stored in peel pouches or (blue) sterilization paper. Internal and external chemical indicators are required for all instrument processing.

After the instruments are properly packaged, they are ready for **sterilization**. It is necessary to read all of the instructions for the sterilizer's use to ensure successful results. It is also important to allow the packages to dry thoroughly prior to removing them from the sterilizer to prevent the package from being compromised and/or wicked when wet instruments are left on a wet surface. Any sterilized packaged instruments must remain in their packages until point of use.

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- Your ZIRC expert reviews the amount of patient flow for each procedure
- You receive a custom plan that's right for you
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Oral health professionals should always **store** sterile instruments in closed, dry cabinetry or bin systems. It is very important to keep instruments organized. This not only helps with procedure efficiency but also reduces the risk of sharps injury. It is well known that patients are not always excited about visiting the dental office. As such, an office that is well organized, prepared, systematized, and structured will reduce chair time for patients and promote provider/patient confidence.

One strategy to manage and organize instruments is to use pre-set cassettes. Clinicians just need to determine which instruments they will need for specific procedures such as examination, periodontal assessment, prevention, surgery, etc. If a tray system is used, these can be color coded to assist with identification. Storage tubs may also help in the organization of materials. Traditionally, tubs house materials and supplies for specific procedures and are stored in a central area. A final strategy is to use a color-coding system for instruments. This utilizes small color-coded bands that slide onto the instrument handle. Color coding is used to identify the procedure and/or practitioner.

After instrument management, organization, and sterilization are complete, the instruments are **delivered** to operatories for patient care. Oral health professionals need to evaluate the chemical indicators prior to opening the packaging and ensure sterilized packages are opened in the presence of the patient.

The last step in instrument processing is **quality assurance**, which includes record keeping and documentation related to the sterilization process. There are many systems available for instrument organization to improve efficiency, but the **implementation** of a system is the critical element to ensuring staff and patient safety.



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