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# **The Do's and Don'ts in the Instrument Sterilisation Process**





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Just like a skilfully placed filling, the dental sterilisation process requires fine attention to detail. One overlooked step during this critical process can disrupt the entire procedure or result in a less than optimal overall effect.

Here are some important things to keep in mind...

## The Dos:

**DO** sterilise equipment when possible, rather than sanitise it. Check the manufacturer labels on your equipment, such as XCP or radiograph mounts that some offices spray down or soak in a cold sterile solution, when steam sterilization may be more appropriate.

**DO** check the settings on your autoclave. Make sure that the cycle is set on the appropriate time, pressure, and temperature. If you're running it with normally packaged instruments but setting it for a flash cycle where instruments are bagged, true sterilisation cannot occur.

**DO** use protective, disposable barriers when at all possible. These limit the amount of bodily fluid and debris that can be passed onto equipment surfaces, such as handpieces or radiograph mounts.

**DO** clean your instruments properly before loading them into the steriliser. If this means a wipe down or autoclave bath, be sure it is included and that the instrument is rinsed thoroughly before being placed into a cassette or bag. Otherwise the debris will become "baked onto" the instrument inside of the sterilization machine.



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## The Don'ts:

**DON'T** open the autoclave door after the machine has been turned on. Steam or water could escape and cause severe burns.

**DON'T** overload the sterilisation machine, as this can prevent steam circulation and fail to properly sterilise some of the instruments buried underneath. To help this, lay packets in one layer on each tray, or use cassettes which can be stacked on top of one another to load the machine more fully.

**DON'T** skip required vaccinations. As healthcare personnel, dental practitioners are exposed to communicable diseases that can be prevented through vaccination.



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## Helpful Hints in the Sterilization Room

- Allow your instruments to dry fully after the cycle is complete. This can reduce rusting or damage to sharp edges. Handling dry packages or cassettes further reduces your risk of cross-contamination and re-contaminating sterilized instrument pouches.
- Keep “clean” and “dirty” areas separated at all times. Having designated zones on each side of your sterilization machine will subconsciously remind staff to keep clean and contaminated items away from one another.
- Wash your hands and don't use contaminated gloves that touch “dirty” surfaces when moving to “clean” ones.

One extremely common mistake is using a clean glove to open the sterilization machine and then unload the instruments. If the machine handle was closed using a dirty glove, all of the recently processed instruments are now being touched with a contaminated glove that someone might otherwise think is clean.

- Wipe down your machine handles with a sanitizing cloth after loading and starting the cycle.



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## Safety Guidelines and Precautions

Wear appropriate PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) at all times; whether it's processing the dirty instruments, loading them into packages or cassettes, or unloading the autoclave. These should include items like heat-insulating gloves, eyewear or a face shield, splash aprons, and closed toe shoes.

Don't gamble on you or your patients' safety. A proper sterilization program protects everyone in the dental office!