



Engage Your Patients in a Conversation About Instrument Reprocessing

Q. I see you have information on Dental Infection Control Awareness Month.' What is that?

A. Dental Infection Control Awareness Month' is an annual campaign about infection control in the dental office, held in September. It highlights infection control in dentistry. Infection control is one of the things our office is committed to, so we can provide you with safe care. We take it very seriously.

Q. What do you do with the instruments after you've used them on a patient?

A. We follow all the CDC guidelines and recommendations on how we treat instruments. We clean and sterilize instruments after use on one patient so that we have sterile instruments when we treat you.

Q. How do you sterilize (treat) the instruments?

A. We clean them first, that's because if there were any debris stuck to the instruments it would not be possible to properly sterilize them. After that, we place them in special closed pouches or wrap them. Then we place these in a sterilizer that kills all bacteria and other germs present on the instruments (and wrap/pouch). The end result is clean and sterile instruments for each of our patients.

Q. How do you know all of the bacteria/germs are killed and that the instruments are actually sterile? How do I know the instruments are clean (sterile)?

A. We follow the CDC recommendations on using a special test kit containing spores—these are harder than normal bacteria and germs. Using this test, we can check that the sterilizer is doing what it is supposed to do. If the hardy spores in the test kit are killed in the sterilizer, then we know it is working. And, since the spores are harder than normal bacteria and germs, we also know we are killing all of the bacteria and germs too.

Q. What about instruments you can't sterilize? What do you do with those?

A. We use single-use, disposable instruments as much as possible—after we use those on one patient, we throw them away. Liquids that can sterilize instruments are used for the few instruments that are not disposable and cannot stand the high temperatures in steam sterilizers.

Q. I'm a little concerned having read some of the news. How do I know the instruments are sterilized?

A. We follow all of the guidelines, and we keep a record—what was sterilized, when, where and how. That's actually a requirement. We can show you our sterilization center if you would like to see it and we'd also be happy to show you the records we keep on our sterilization procedures.

Q. What is OSAP?

A. OSAP is a non-profit organization dedicated to infection control in dentistry that's been around for over 30 years, and provides us with educational materials, updates and training.



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