

Flash Sterilization In Health Care Settings

This document is current to January 1, 2008, and is not updated. It was prepared at a time when PIDAC reported directly to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care and Chief Medical Officer of Health. Note that effective April 1, 2011, the responsibility for and functions of the Provincial Infectious Diseases Advisory Committee ("PIDAC") were transferred to the Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion ("Agency"), and that PIDAC now reports to that Agency. You may wish to consult www.pidac.ca or the Agency's website at www.oahpp.ca for more information.



Flash Sterilization

In

Health Care Settings

Information for Health Care Professionals

Highlights:

- Flash sterilization should only be used in an emergency
- Follow the Provincial Infectious Diseases Advisory Committee (PIDAC) document “Best Practices For Cleaning, Disinfection, and Sterilization In All Health Care Settings”
- Flash sterilization should never be used for implantable equipment/devices
- Operative scheduling and lack of instrumentation do not qualify as reasons to use flash sterilization
- If flash sterilization is used in an emergency situation, the use must be fully documented (see below)

According to PIDAC, sterilization is a process that involves multiple steps; only one of those steps is the sterilization cycle. Flash sterilization does not adequately include these other process steps beyond the sterilization cycle.

The Canadian Standards Association (CSA) states that the delivery of sterile products for use in patient care depends not only on the efficacy of the sterilization process itself but also on efficient facility design, good infection control practices, effective quality control, and other aspects of device processing prior to, during, and after sterilization.

Effective sterilization is impaired if all the necessary parameters of the process are not met. These include, but are not limited to the following:

- Decontamination and sterilization areas must meet the requirements for processing space
- A biological monitor must be included daily with each type of cycle and every load configuration
- The load printout must be signed to verify that the required time, temperature and pressure have been achieved
- All staff performing emergency (flash) sterilization should be appropriately trained.

In most situations, flash sterilization will not meet all these parameters.

When instruments are flash sterilized, PIDAC advises health care settings to maintain a record for each piece of equipment/device being subjected to flash sterilization. This record must include:

- The name of the patient and the unique patient identifier
- The procedure and date
- The reason for flashing
- The print-out of the cycle and the monitors
- The physician and the practitioner, e.g. surgeon and circulating nurse
- The equipment/device flash sterilized

The record(s) must be reviewed and analysed on a regular basis to ensure that flash sterilization is not being overused and that reasons leading to flash sterilization are corrected.

An incident report should be filed as per the setting's incident reporting system.

There must be a procedure for notification of the patient in the event of a recall (e.g. positive Biological Indicator).

For further information consult:

- **A videoconference related to the above document:**
<http://webcast.northnetwork.com/archives.php>
- **Provincial Infectious Diseases Advisory Committee (PIDAC) - MOHLTC Best Practice Practices for Cleaning, Disinfection and Sterilization – In all Health Care Settings (April 30, 2006):**
<http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/providers/program/infectious/diseases/iccds.html>
- **Canadian Standards Association Z314.13-01 Recommended Standard Practices for Emergency (Flash) Sterilization (Reaffirmed 2006)**
https://www.csa-intl.org/onlinestore/order_success2.asp
- **Health Canada Infection Control Guidelines – Hand Washing, Cleaning, Disinfection and Sterilization in Health Care (December 1998)**
- **Operating Nurses Association of Canada (ORNAC) Standards, (August 2006)**