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**Can you please tell me how long sterilized bagged instrument can stay in our drawers.**

Regarding instrument storage, *Infection Control and Management of Hazardous Materials for the Dental Team* states:

*One can place instruments from sterile packs or pouches on sterile, disposable, or at least cleaned and disinfected trays at chairside. Sterilized instrument cassettes are distributed to and opened at chairside. Placement of unwrapped or wrapped instruments in drawers or cabinets for direct use at chairside during patient care is not recommended. The drawers or cabinets and their contents are contaminated too easily from retrieval of items with saliva-coated fingers and from contaminated aerosols. This type of storage/distribution system at chairside for instruments or supplies is fraught with great potential for cross-contamination.*<sup>1</sup>

Ask OSAP is not in the position to know the regulations and requirements in all states. It is recommended that you contact your state dental board and/or state health department to find out more about what is required in your state. A number of US states have adopted the 2003 CDC guidelines for infection control in dentistry as part of their regulatory code.

Ask OSAP can provide you with some general information on this topic.

Regarding package labeling, the 2003 CDC guidelines for infection control in dentistry states as follows:

*Storage of Sterilized Items and Clean Dental Supplies*

*The storage area should contain enclosed storage for sterile items and disposable (single-use) items (173). Storage practices for wrapped sterilized instruments can be either date- or event-related. Packages containing sterile supplies should be inspected before use to verify barrier integrity and dryness.*

*Although some health-care facilities continue to date every sterilized package and use shelf-life practices, other facilities have switched to event-related practices (243). This approach recognizes that the product should remain sterile indefinitely, unless an event causes it to become contaminated (e.g., torn or wet packaging) (284). Even for event-related packaging, minimally, the date of sterilization should be placed on the package, and if multiple sterilizers are used in the facility, the sterilizer used should be indicated on the outside of the packaging material to facilitate the retrieval of processed items in the event of a sterilization failure (247). If packaging is compromised, the instruments should be recleaned, packaged in new wrap, and sterilized again.*

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Additionally, *Practical Infection Control In Dentistry* states as follows:

*After packaging is completed, the package should be labeled (Table 16-5). Automated labeling devices are available that can preprint the information on self-adhesive labels. This provides an efficient method for creating legible and standardized labels. If a handwritten label is used, the marking pen should be indelible, nonbleeding, and nontoxic. Felt-tip ink pens or a very soft lead pencil may be used. Do not write on paper or cloth wrapping materials. Peel packages should be labeled on the plastic portion or on the self-sealing tab <sup>3</sup>*

TABLE 16-5 Information to include on the Package Label

- Sterilizer identification number
- Load number
- Operator's initials
- An indefinite shelf-life label (if using event-related shelf life) with the date of sterilization, or, if using time-related shelf-life policies, an expiration date
- Package contents <sup>3</sup>

*Summary of Infection Prevention Practices in Dental Settings Basic Expectations for Safe Care*

can be accessed at:

<https://www.cdc.gov/oralhealth/infectioncontrol/pdf/safe-care2.pdf> <sup>4</sup>

This document states:

*After cleaning, dried instruments should be inspected, wrapped, packaged, or placed into container systems before heat sterilization. Packages should be labeled to show the sterilizer used, the cycle or load number, the date of sterilization, and, if applicable, the expiration date. This information can help in retrieving processed items in the event of an instrument processing / sterilization failure.<sup>4</sup>*

## Resources

- 1) Miller CH. Infection Control and Management of Hazardous Materials for the Dental Team, 6th edition. Elsevier/Mosby Publishers. Page 133.
- 2) Kohn WG, Collins AS, Cleveland JL, Harte JA, Eklund KJ, Malvitz DM, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Guidelines for infection control in dental health-care settings—2003. MMWR Recomm Rep 2003;52(RR-17):1-61. <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr5217a1.htm>  
Accessed on March 12, 2020.
- 3) Molinari JA and Harte JA. Practical Infection Control In Dentistry – Third Edition. Wolters Kluwer / Lippincott / Williams & Wilkins. Pages 226 - 227.
- 4) US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Summary of Infection Prevention Practices in Dental Settings: Basic Expectations for Safe Care. Atlanta, GA: US Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Division of Oral Health; March 2016. <https://www.cdc.gov/oralhealth/infectioncontrol/pdf/safe-care2.pdf>  
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