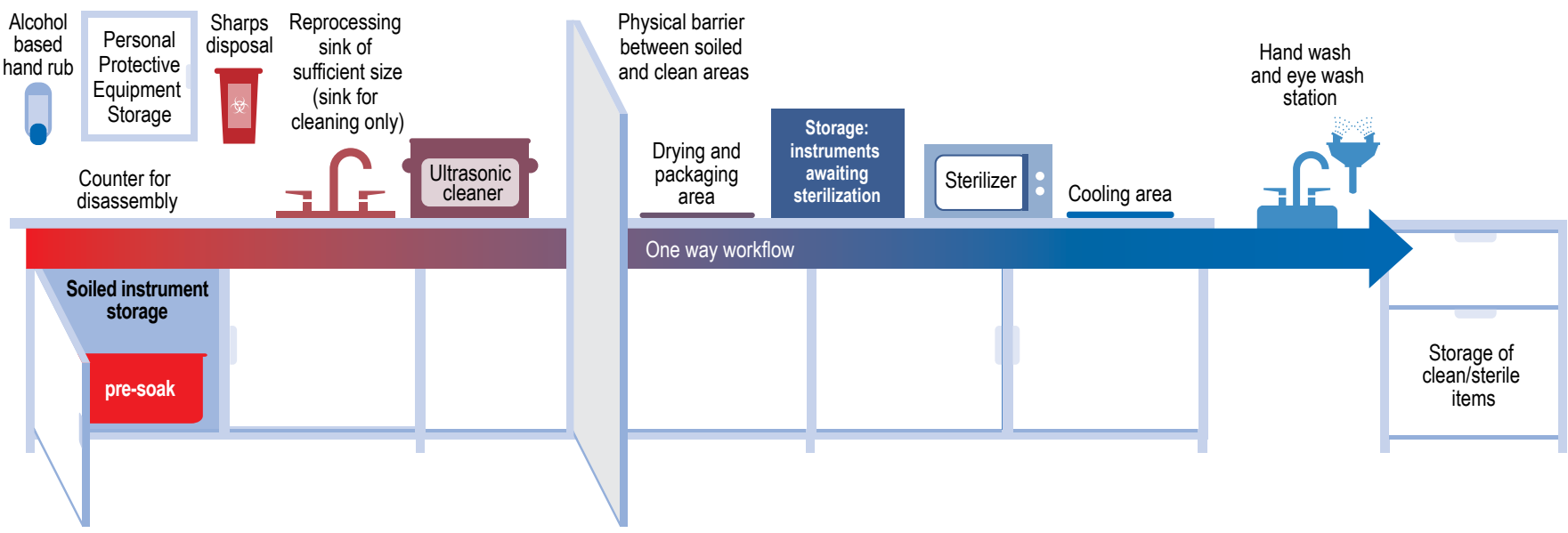
Ottawa Public Health | Santé publique

Reprocessing quick reference

Elements of a designated reprocessing area



Elements of reprocessing reusable instruments

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) must always be available

Masks, gowns, gloves (puncture-resistant) and eye protection are necessary when splashes or sprays may occur.

Pre-cleaning	Transport	Disassembly	Cleaning	Drying	Sterilization
Remove gross soil immediately to prevent drying	Transport container must be cleanable, closed, covered and puncture proof Dispose of sharps promptly (ideally at point of care)	Disassemble as per Manufacturer's Instructions for Use (MIFU) Inspect for damage Sort instruments into sets Soak/pre-treat	Completely submerge equipment Manual friction with detergent or mechanical cleaning if available (e.g. ultrasonic cleaner or washer/disinfector) *mechanical cleaning is preferred. Rinse	Use lint-free towel Compressed filtered air to dry lumens Lubricate, reassemble as required	Items must not touch in package, open hinged items Wrap/label with date, sterilizer used, load number, and initials. Add load contents if not visible. Ensure quality indicators are documented: • Physical parameters • Chemical indicator – internal and external • Biological indicator

Quality control

Sterilization process

- ✓ Physical indicators (time, temperature, pressure) – monitor with each load by the sterilizer printout or USB
- ✓ Chemical indicators – monitor on each package
  - Internal indicators should be a minimum Class
  - External indicators are Class 1
  - For dynamic air removal type sterilizer, perform a Class 2 indicator (Bowie-Dick) once daily in a process challenge device (PCD)
- ✓ Biological indicators – monitor once daily minimum
  - Place a biological indicator in a PCD in the first load of each sterilizer in use daily
  - Use a biological indicator in every load containing implants
  - Instruments must be held until the result of the biological indicator is available. To use the instruments prior to results, an internal Class 5 or 6 chemical indicator should be in a PCD in each load

Ultrasonic cleaners

- ✓ Performance testing done weekly according to manufacturer's instructions

High level disinfectant

- ✓ Use test strips each day it is used according to manufacturer's instructions

DOCUMENTATION REQUIRED

Single-use medical/ dental instruments and equipment are usually labelled by the manufacturer with a symbol.

Any equipment labelled as single-use can never be reprocessed or re-used. Examples: syringes, needles, some suction tips, etc.

Storage

Never store sterile/clean instruments in the soiled area of the reprocessing room, on the floor, under/adjacent to sinks or with unclean items.

Store single-use disposable semi-critical items

- Store in a clean, dry, covered area and handled with clean hands or forceps

Store reprocessed sterile or critical items

- In sterile package until time of use
- in clean, dry, secure area that prevents contamination
- Only handle with clean hands
- Storage is not accessible from soil reprocessing area
- Ensure items that have been reprocessed can be differentiated from items that have not (i.e. colour coding)

01.2026

Ottawa Public Health
Santé publique

Key principles for reprocessing instruments

It is essential to maintain an overall inventory of instruments used in each facility.

The inventory must have:

- ✓ The recommended reprocessing instructions for each instrument
- ✓ Reflect the manufacturer's instructions for use for each item
- ✓ Be shared and accessible to all staff involved in reprocessing

Policies need to include:

Cleaning and maintenance

- Environmental cleaning process and schedule for reprocessing area
- Scheduled maintenance for cleaning and sterilization equipment

Reprocessing

- All aspects of reprocessing
- Process for recall of instruments if there is a reprocessing failure
- Quality monitoring and documentation
- Items are reprocessed as per manufacturer's instructions or are single use
- Single-use items are not reprocessed

Occupational Health and Safety

- Response to blood/body fluid spills or exposures
- Prevention/management of sharps injuries
- Use of personal protective equipment
- All chemicals are approved by Health Canada

Education and training

- Specify requirements for staff education and training
- Frequency of education and training at regular intervals (e.g. orientation and continuing education)
- Competency assessment for all personnel involved in reprocessing

Reprocessing decision tree

Is this item single-use?

Yes → **Dispose as per waste management policy**

No

Is this item a critical instrument?

Enters sterile tissue, including the vascular system

Yes → **Sterilization as per MIFU**

e.g. surgical instruments, surgical burs, high speed hand tools, mouth mirrors, dental impression trays, cotton pliers, foot care equipment, implants, forceps, curettes, specula

No

Is this item a semi-critical instrument?

Comes in contact with non-intact skin or mucous membranes but does not penetrate them

Yes → **Sterilization as per MIFU**

e.g. surgical instruments, surgical burs, high speed hand tools, mouth mirrors, dental impression trays, cotton pliers, foot care equipment, implants, forceps, curettes, specula

No

Is this item a non-critical device/equipment?

Touches only intact skin and not mucous membranes or does not directly touch the patient

Yes → **Low level disinfection as per MIFU**

e.g. radiograph head/cone, blood pressure cuff, stethoscopes, glucose meter, thermometer, environmental surfaces touched during procedures

MIFU = Manufacturer's Instructions for Use

If there is a discrepancy between the reprocessing level recommended by the manufacturer and the intended use of the instrument by Spaulding's criteria, the higher level of disinfection/ sterilization must be used.**

Helpful resources

Public Health Ontario – Reprocessing resources

Public Health Ontario – IPAC online learning

Public Health Ontario – Resources for preventing IPAC lapses

Best Practices for Cleaning, Disinfection and Sterilization of Medical Equipment/Devices in all Health Care Settings (includes Spaulding's Criteria)

**If the MIFUs not compatible with Spaulding's criteria, alternative device or instrument should be considered.

Adapted and reprinted with permission of the Region of Waterloo Public Health and Paramedic Services.