

Invisible Work, Visible Impact: Infection Prevention Starts Here

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Objectives

- **Describe** the essential role of sterile processing in infection prevention and patient safety
- **Identify** key risk points in the instrument reprocessing cycle where contamination can occur
- **Explain** the impact of effective communication and collaboration between OR and SPD
- **Apply** best practices that support sterility assurance and reduce the risk of infection

Invisible Work, Visible Impact:

**SPD + Surgical Team + Infection Prevention =
One Continuous Chain of Patient Safety**

Invisible Work, Visible Impact:

Sterile Processing as the Foundation of Patient Safety

Safe surgery starts before the patient enters the OR.

ANSI/AAMI ST79:2017/(R)2022; AORN, *Guideline for Sterilization* (2024);
CMS, *ASC Infection Control Surveyor Worksheet*, Exhibit 351 (2022).

Invisible Work, Visible Impact:

- Sterile Processing is essential to patient safety.
- Every instrument we prepare could touch a patient.
- Infection prevention begins long before the incision.

The Invisible Work Behind Every Procedure

SPD's role is often unseen but always essential.

Invisible Work, Visible Impact:

The instrument's journey begins long before it reaches
the patient.

AORN. *Why Do We Perform Point-of-Use Instrument Care?* 2023;

CDC. *Guideline for Disinfection and Sterilization in Healthcare Facilities: Cleaning.* Nov. 2023

Invisible Work, Visible Impact:

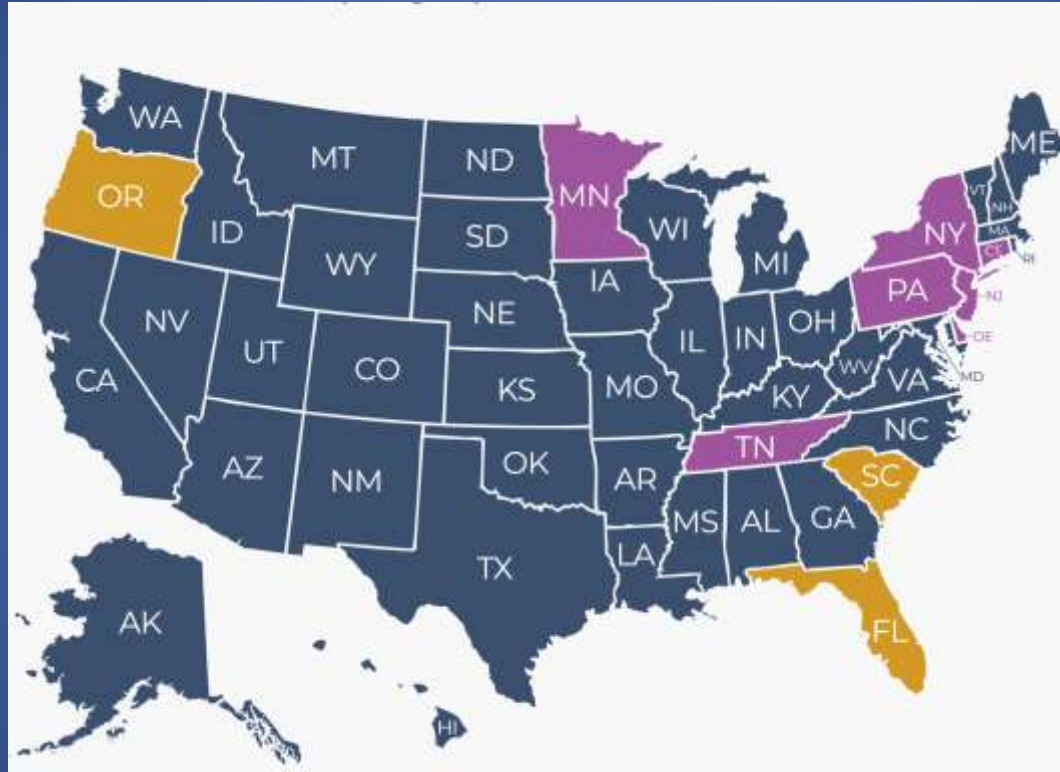
SPD is a Clinical Discipline

Reprocessing requires microbiology, human factors, regulatory expertise and certification.

ANSI/AAMI ST79; Pennsylvania Act 80 of 2020, §§ 301-302; N.J.A.C. 8:43G-8.2.

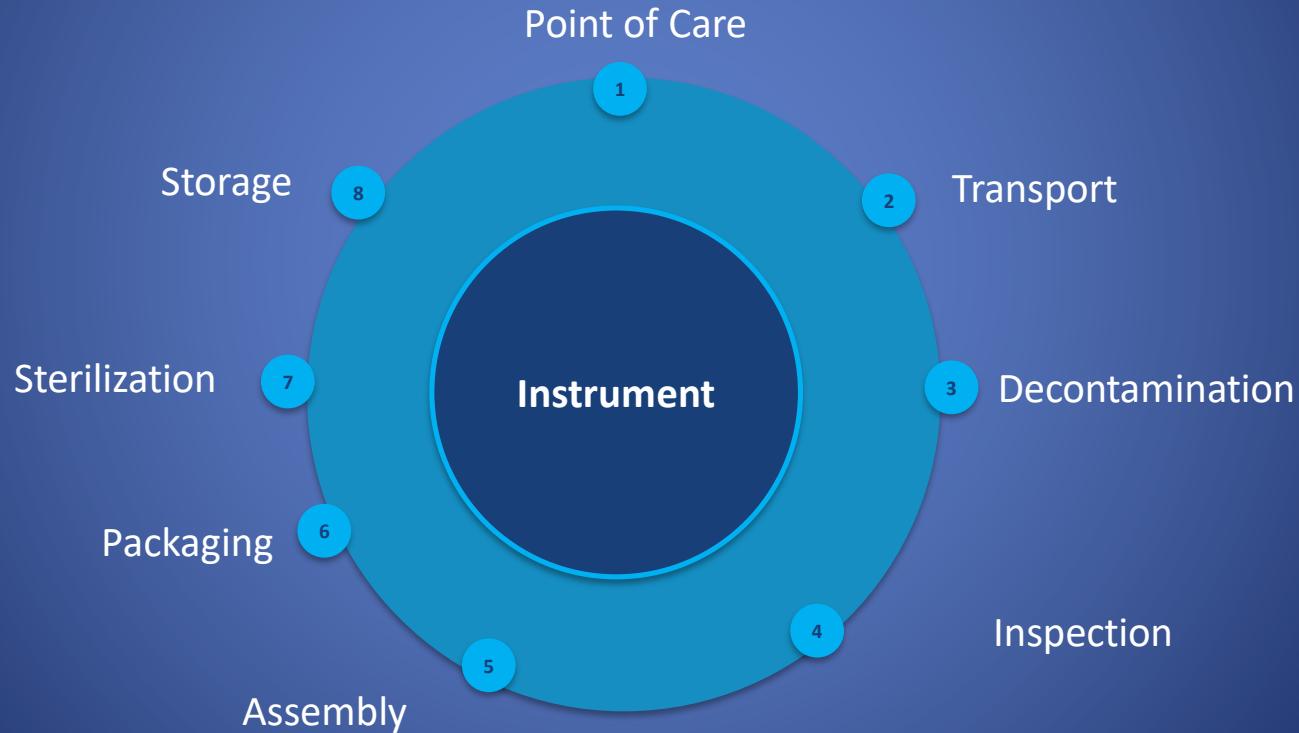
CERTIFICATION LEGISLATION/REGULATIONS

Current Sterile Processing technician certification legislation.



<https://myhspa.org/about/advocacy/legislative-certification-issues/>

The journey of an Instrument



Invisible Work, Visible Impact:

Risk Point #1: Point-of-Use Cleaning (OR)

Biofilm begins forming within minutes.

CDC, “Cleaning,” Guideline for Disinfection and Sterilization in Healthcare Facilities. 2023
ANSI/AAMI ST79: 2017 6.3 *Comprehensive guide to steam sterilization and sterility assurance in health care facilities*

Point-of-Use Cleaning (OR)



Invisible Work, Visible Impact:

Risk Point #2: Transport

Contain used instruments and prevent soil from drying.

https://www.aorn.org/article/why-do-we-perform-point-of-use-instrument-care?utm_source=chatgpt.com

OSHA, Bloodborne Pathogens Standard, 29 CFR 1910.1030
CDC, Disinfection and Sterilization Recommendations 2023

Risk Point #2: Transport

Closed/Contained Transport of Soiled Surgical Instruments

Keeps staff safe. Prevents exposure. Protects the environment.



Lid securely closed during transport



Secure, leak-resistant design



Easily maneuvered, dedicated wheeled cart



Closed and leak-proof



Prevents exposure
to blood and body fluids



Reduces risk of contamination



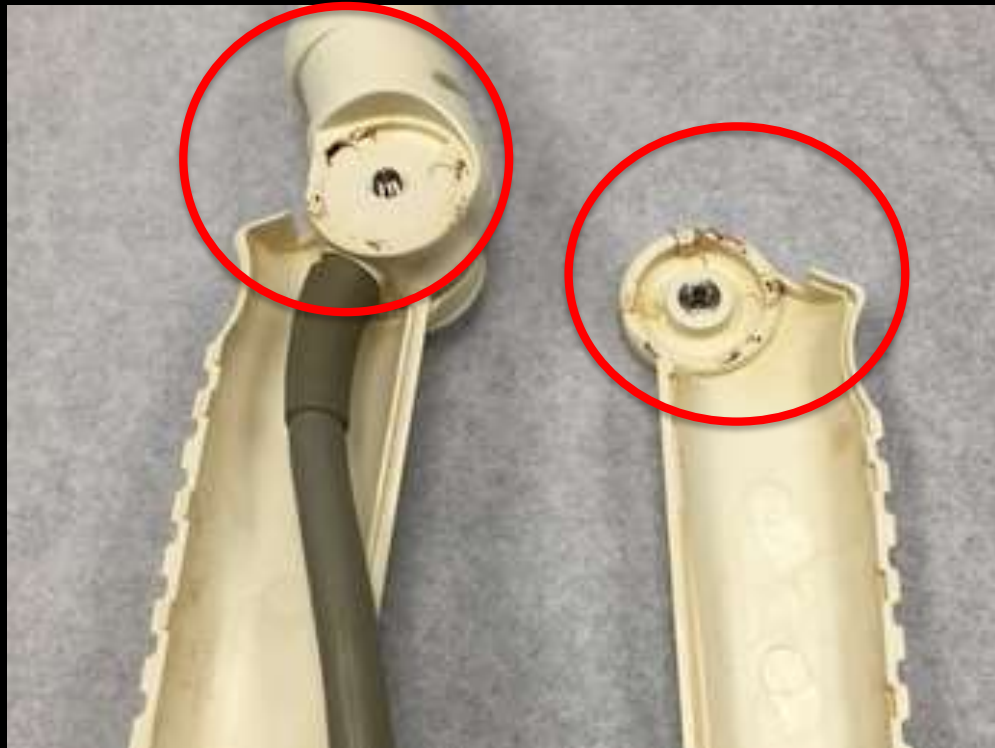
Dedicated carts/bins
for soiled items only

Invisible Work, Visible Impact:

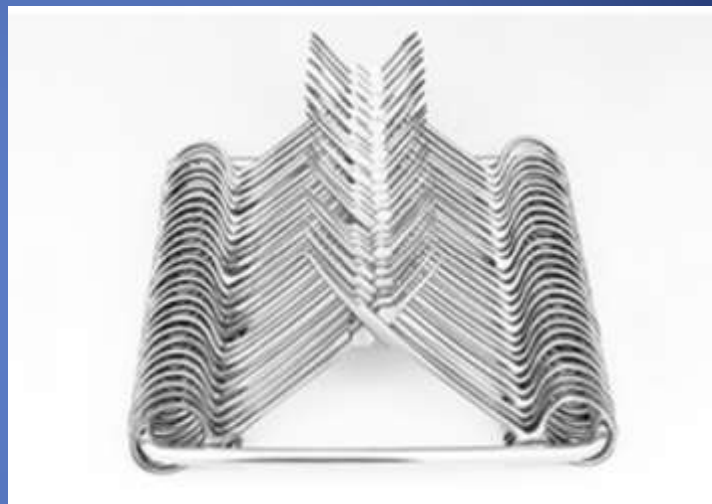
Risk Point #3: Decontamination

Handling instruments contaminated with blood and body fluids requires meticulous attention to safety protocols.

CDC, Guideline for Disinfection and Sterilization in Healthcare Facilities, “Cleaning” Recommendations §2; ANSI/AAMI ST79:2017/(R)2022, Comprehensive guide to steam sterilization and sterility assurance in health care facilities.







Invisible Work, Visible Impact:

Environmental Controls

Airflow, humidity, temperature, and workflow separation.



Invisible Work, Visible Impact:

Water Quality & Detergent Management

The foundation of effective cleaning.

Invisible Work, Visible Impact:

Risk Point #4 & 5: Inspection & Assembly

Missed debris = failed sterilization.

CDC, *Guideline for Disinfection and Sterilization in Healthcare Facilities*, “[Cleaning](#)”
“[Sterilizing Practices](#)”; ANSI/AAMI ST79:2017/(R)2022.

Invisible Work, Visible Impact:

Tray Weight & Assembly Standards

Heavy trays increase risk.

Invisible Work, Visible Impact:

Risk Point #6: Packaging

Packaging must let the sterilant reach every instrument and protect the contents from contamination until use.

<https://www.cdc.gov/infection-control/hcp/disinfection-sterilization/summary-recommendations.html>

Invisible Work, Visible Impact:

Risk Point #7: Sterilization

Cycle selection, loading, and documentation determine sterility assurance.

<https://www.cdc.gov/infection-control/hcp/disinfection-sterilization/summary-recommendations.html>

[ANSI/AAMI ST79:2017/\(R\)2022](#)

Invisible Work, Visible Impact:

Chemical & Biological Indicators

Verification of sterility assurance.

Invisible Work, Visible Impact:

Instruction For Use (IFU) Compliance: Non-Negotiable

Every instrument. Every time.

Invisible Work, Visible Impact:

Documentation & Traceability

If it isn't documented, it didn't happen.

Invisible Work, Visible Impact:

Risk Point #8: Storage & Return to OR

Sterility must be protected until the moment of use.

CDC, Recommendations for Disinfection and Sterilization, §18
ANSI/AAMI ST79:2017/(R)2022

Invisible Work, Visible Impact:



Invisible Work, Visible Impact:

Key Risk Points: Overview

Contamination can occur at any stage.

Invisible Work, Visible Impact:

The Patient Safety Connection

Every tray represents a human being.

Invisible Work, Visible Impact:

The Power of Shared Language

Shared terms, structured handoffs, and closed loop communication.

AORN, *Guideline for Team Communication*, in *Guidelines for Perioperative Practice* (2024); Speth J. “Guidelines in Practice: Team Communication.” *AORN Journal*. 2024. [Article summary](#); AHRQ, [TeamSTEPPS Pocket Guide](#)

Invisible Work, Visible Impact:

A Shared Communication Framework Across Operating Room,
Sterile Processing Department and Infection Prevention

Audit Tool Example

CASE CART Audit

CASE SCHEDULED Correctly: Y N 11/6/2020

Correct Procedure Applied: _____

CASE CART Complete: Y N

PREFERENCE CARD Correct: Y N

Did Items MISSING or NEEDED	SPD Ready 1st	SPD Ready 2nd	SPD Ready 3rd	SPD Ready 4th	SPD Ready 5th	SPD Ready 6th
Tray Name: _____						
Tray Name: _____						
Tray Name: _____						
Tray Name: _____						
Tray Name: _____						

INSTRUMENT TRAY Issues: Y N If No - please Write Name below:

	SPD Notified: *Correctly / Issue	Mgr x3015	1st Lead x3337	2nd Lead x3682
Sticker Here or - Count Sheet				
Sticker Here or - Count Sheet				

**** Dirty CASE CART Audit ****

Yes _____ No _____	Enzymatic solution applied to dirty instruments
Yes _____ No _____	Instruments unclamped - opened
Yes _____ No _____	Case Cart flagged "DIRTY"

SA/ RN/ Tech: _____ Date: 9/28/26 OR# 2 Cart# _____

TRANSPORTATION
DATE: _____
CASE/PROCEDURES: _____
ROOM/FACILITY: _____
INITIALS: _____

CLE

TRANSPORT
UNCLAMP AND OPEN INSTRUMENTS
ALL INSTRUMENTS MUST BE UNCLAMPED AND OPENED
INSTRUMENTS MUST BE UNCLAMPED AND OPENED
UNCLAMPED AND OPENED
INITIALS: _____
OR# _____

h health
HEALTH CARE PROVIDER

Invisible Work, Visible Impact:

The Impact of Poor Communication

Delays, repeated failures, and increased patient-safety risk.

ANSI/AAMI ST79:2017/(R)2022; AORN, *Guideline for Team Communication*, in *Guidelines for Perioperative Practice* (2026)

Invisible Work, Visible Impact:

Common Communication Breakdowns

Where information and processes can break down

ANSI/AAMI ST79:2017/(R)2022; AORN, *Guideline for Team Communication*, in *Guidelines for Perioperative Practice* (2026); <https://www.ahrq.gov/sites/default/files/wysiwyg/teamstepps-program/teamstepps-pocket-guide.pdf> (2023).

Invisible Work, Visible Impact:

Building a Culture of Safety

Safety is not a task — it is a mindset.

Invisible Work, Visible Impact:

Real-Time Escalation Pathways

Stop-the-line culture protects patients.

AORN, *Guideline for Team Communication*, in *Guidelines for Perioperative Practice* (2026)

Invisible Work, Visible Impact:

Shared Accountability

We succeed together or fail together.

Invisible Work, Visible Impact:

Breaking Down Silos

Silos create risk.

Journal of Public Health Management & Practice [30\(6\):p E306-E311, November/December 2024.](#) | DOI: 10.1097/PHH.0000000000002007

Invisible Work, Visible Impact:

Psychological Safety

People speak up when they feel safe.

<https://www.apa.org/topics/healthy-workplaces/psychological-safety>

Invisible Work, Visible Impact:

Leadership's Role in Sterility Assurance

Leaders set the tone.

Invisible Work, Visible Impact:

Culture of Safety: What It Really Means

Safety is built through habits, not slogans.

Invisible Work, Visible Impact:

Turnover Communication & Scheduling

Timing affects sterility assurance.

Invisible Work, Visible Impact:

Loaner Tray Challenges

High risk, high complexity, high need for communication



Invisible Work, Visible Impact:

Respect for Each Other's Expertise

Every role is essential.

Invisible Work, Visible Impact:

Joint Rounding: OR + SPD + IP

Seeing the process together builds understanding.

Invisible Work, Visible Impact:

Best Practices Overview

Evidence-based practices that reduce infection risk.

Invisible Work, Visible Impact:

Competency Validation

Skills-based, not just written.

Invisible Work, Visible Impact:

Root Cause Analysis (RCA)

Understanding the “why” behind failures.

Invisible Work, Visible Impact:

Wet Packs: Root Cause & Prevention

Wet packs are a symptom of a system problem.

Invisible Work, Visible Impact:

Corrective Action Plans (CAP)

Fixing problems at the system level.

Invisible Work, Visible Impact:

Interdisciplinary Teamwork

We are one system, not separate departments.

Invisible Work, Visible Impact:

Seeing Each Other's Work

Understanding builds respect.

Invisible Work, Visible Impact:

Shared Education

Learning together strengthens the system.

Invisible Work, Visible Impact:

Respecting Workflow Realities

Safety requires realistic expectations.

Invisible Work, Visible Impact:

The Human Factors Behind Errors

Most errors are system problems, not people problems.

Invisible Work, Visible Impact:

Celebrating Wins

Safety improves when we recognize success.

Recognizing safe practices reinforces the behaviors we want to repeat and supports a stronger patient safety culture.

The Patient at the Center

Every step in reprocessing contributes to a safer procedure.



Infection Prevention Is a Team Sport

No one can do it alone.



Invisible work. Visible impact. Shared mission.

Different Roles. One Goal. Preventing Surgical Site Infections.



CLEAN INSTRUMENTS + SAFE PRACTICES + STRONG COLLABORATION = SAFER PATIENTS