

Storage of sterilized medical products

Unwrapped sterilized instruments cannot be transported or stored without **packaging**. According to WHO (1), sterilized unwrapped instruments must be used on the patient immediately. Packaging protects the sterile contents from re-contamination or soiling until the contents are used on the patient. But how long can wrapped sterile instruments be stored for? Who determines the expiry date? (2)

The loss of sterility fundamentally depends on the external influences present during storage, handling and transportation. When it comes to the possible storage duration, the storage conditions themselves are crucial. A suitable storage place for sterile wrapped instruments **should have the following properties:**

- › It should be clean and dry
- › It should be segregated from non-sterilized products

In addition, the sterilizer identification and both the sterilization and expiry dates should be noted e.g. on label stickers where the batch number should also be documented for traceability, together with the name of the person in charge.

As soon as any damage is observed during the inspection of the stored packaging, the damaged packaging is to be regarded as no longer sterile and contaminated with germs.

What about stock rotation – First in - First out?



How to operate your stock rotation?

Freshly sterilized wrapped instruments should be stored in the back of the storage so that the ones in the front and thus sterilized at an earlier date will be used next. So – first in will be first out – and prolonged storage times or storage beyond expiry can be avoided.

Important to know: In the case of a sterile wrapped single-use material, the expiry date provided by the manufacturer determines the possible storage period with regard to intact packaging. On average, a five-year storage period is typical for industrially produced sterile goods. Any exceptions are indicated by the manufacturer in question. Good to know: Standards are in place regarding packaging and packaging materials (1;2;3 for more detailed information).

Bibliography:

- (1) WHO Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data, Decontamination and reprocessing of medical devices for health-care facilities. World Health Organization. II. Pan American Health Organization. ISBN 978 92 4 154985 1
- (2) EN ISO 11607
- (3) EN ISO 285, EN 868