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## Staff Report

# Infection Control



**Andrea L. Cook**  
Orthodontic Clinical Consultant

Orthodontists find managing various aspects of their practice more challenging than treating patients. Most of my clients tell me, "If I could just stick to moving teeth, I would be so happy." Managing the practice is one of the areas they find most challenging and frustrating; management of sterilization, OSHA, and instrument reprocessing are some of the least favorite areas of the orthodontic office.

**"Sterilization is a complex process requiring specialized equipment, adequate space, qualified dental health care professionals who are provided with ongoing training, and regular monitoring for quality assurance."**

—Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 2003

The current recommendations for infection control and instrument reprocessing are published in the CDC's *Guidelines for Infection Control in Dental Health-Care Settings, 2003*. Although many offices struggle to grasp the current guidelines, understanding them is the first step in developing and implementing systems and protocols that will help you and your team gain compliance.

In March 2016, the CDC released an update to the *Guidelines for Infection Control in Dental Health-Care Settings, 2003*. The additional recommendations are mostly administrative, rather than clinical changes to the infection control and sterilization protocols. The new document can be viewed [online](#). This document summarizes existing recommendations, making them much easier to comprehend and use in all dental settings, including our orthodontic practices. The Summary focuses on standard precautions and foundations for preventing transmission of infectious agents during patient care and is intended to supplement the existing CDC recommendations, not to replace them.

The resource includes tools to help our team members follow infection prevention guidelines. These include:

- ❑ a summary of basic infection prevention principles and recommendations for dental settings and
- ❑ a checklist to evaluate dental staff compliance with administrative and clinical practice infection prevention recommendations

The following is a list of recommendations published by the CDC since 2003 that all offices must incorporate into their practices:

### **Administrative Measures**

- ❑ Develop and maintain written infection prevention policies and procedures appropriate for the services provided by the facility and based upon evidence-based guidelines, regulations, or standards.
- ❑ Reassess infection prevention policies and procedures at least annually, or according to state or federal requirements.
- ❑ Assign at least one individual trained in infection prevention to coordinate the program.
- ❑ Provide supplies necessary for adherence to Standard Precautions, including hand hygiene products, safer devices to reduce injuries, and personal protective equipment.
- ❑ Employ a system for early detection and management of potentially infectious persons at initial points of patient encounter.

### **Respiratory Hygiene/Cough Etiquette Infection Prevention Education and Training**

- ❑ Maintain training records according to state and federal requirements.

### **Sterilization and Disinfection of Patient-Care Items and Devices**

- ❑ Make readily available manufacturer instructions for reprocessing reusable dental instruments/equipment, ideally in or near the reprocessing area.

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- Label sterilized items with the sterilizer used, the cycle or load number, the date of sterilization, and (if applicable) the expiration date.
- Ensure routine maintenance for sterilization equipment is performed according to manufacturer instructions; keep maintenance records.

One emphasis of the Summary is the importance of having one individual in every dental practice who functions as the infection prevention coordinator. This individual should be responsible for developing written infection prevention policies for the practice based on the current standards. The infection prevention coordinator also ensures that the practice has the needed equipment and supplies required for adherence to standard precaution practices and communicates with all team members to address infection prevention issues.

Infection prevention coordinator responsibilities in your practice should include the following tasks.

- Review existing policies and standard operating procedures.
- Identify gaps and outdated information.
- Develop written infection prevention policies and procedures.
- Act as a resource for the rest of the team or organization.
- Maintain related permits, licenses, and other documents.
- Provide training and education related to infection prevention.
- Monitor compliance through observations, checklists, and other methods.
- Evaluate current systems:
  - Immunization of the team
  - Occupational exposure to infectious materials

- Post-exposure management
- Hand hygiene procedures
- Use of PPE
- Monitoring the sterilization process
- Evaluation of safety devices
- Dental unit water quality

You should document any training your team receives on the guidelines and infection prevention protocols you have developed; each team member should have a signed copy in his/her personnel file. This will help protect the doctor and practice in case of an accident in the office. If a team member becomes injured and has not been trained, the doctor may be held responsible. Training must be done at hiring, annually, and when processes, products, or tasks change. Your state may have additional regulations that must be met.

The CDC has also developed an **infection prevention checklist** that offices can use to determine their level of compliance. Once the checklist is completed, areas for improvement or change will be clear and a plan of action can be put in place. ♦

*Andrea Cook works as a clinical consultant and trainer for premier orthodontic offices across the country. Andrea works with teams to increase clinical efficiency, implement sterilization systems, improve communication, and guide the office to a new level of excellence.*

*www.andreacookconsulting.com. Email: Andrea@andreacookconsulting.com, 253-332-3376*