



AST Recommended Standards of Practice for Sterile, Wrapped Items Dropped on Floor

Introduction

The following Recommended Standards of Practice were researched and authored by the AST Education and Professional Standards Committee and have been approved by the AST Board of Directors. They are effective April 13, 2008.

AST developed the Recommended Standards of practice to support health care facilities in the reinforcement of best practices as related to the handling of sterile wrapped items that are dropped on the floor. The purpose of the Recommended Standards is to provide an outline that health care workers (HCWs) in the perioperative setting can use to develop and implement policies and procedures for the proper handling of a sterile wrapped item(s) that drop on the floor of the surgery department. The Recommended Standards is presented with the understanding that it is the responsibility of the health care facility to develop, approve, and establish policies and procedures for handling sterile, wrapped items that have been dropped on the floor according to established health care facility protocols.

Rationale

The following Recommended Standards of Practice relate to the proper handling of sterile wrapped item(s) that drop on the floor of the surgery department. The sterility of items is event-related, except for commercially packaged items containing chemicals or drugs, or what is commonly referred to as event-related sterility (ERS). The shelf life of a package is determined if an event occurred that compromises the package and the contents. In other words, ERS is based on the fact that the items within a package are sterile until an event causes the items to be considered contaminated.^{3,4} Events that can cause contamination include moisture penetration, tear(s) or puncture(s) in the wrapper, multiple handling of the package that leads to tearing of the seal and airborne contamination. All members of the surgical team should be involved in the process of developing and implementing health care facility policies and procedures related to sterile packages that are dropped on the floor.

Standard of Practice I

A dropped package sterilized in pervious wrapping material must be considered unsterile.

1. The pervious wrapping material allows for the implosion of air and contaminants into the package.^{3,4}
2. The package should be opened and the enclosed item(s) returned for reprocessing and sterilization.

Standard of Practice II

A dropped package sterilized in impervious wrapping material can be considered sterile.

1. The package must be opened for immediate use if the following criteria is met^{3,4,5}:
 - A. Integrity of the package has not been compromised, eg tear(s), puncture(s).
 - B. Floor or area of contact is dry.
2. The package should not be stored for future use.

Competency Statements

Competency Statements	Measurable Criteria
1. Certified Surgical Technologists (CSTs) and Certified First Assistants (CFAs) have the knowledge and skills for preventing the microbial contamination of the sterile field.	1. Educational standards as established in the <i>Core Curriculum for Surgical Assisting</i> and the <i>Core Curriculum for Surgical Technology</i> . ^{1,2}
2. CSTs and CFAs are knowledgeable of the principles of aseptic technique.	2. The subject of the principles of aseptic technique and creation of the sterile field is included in the didactic studies as a student.
3. CSTs and CFAs have the skills to apply the principles of aseptic technique to prevent contamination of the sterile field.	3. Students demonstrate knowledge of aseptic technique, and creation and maintenance of the sterile field in the lab/mock O.R. setting and during clinical rotation. 4. As practitioners, CSTs and CFAs apply the principles of aseptic technique, and perioperative case management. 5. CSTs and CFAs complete continuing education to remain current in their knowledge of aseptic technique and recommended methods to prevent contamination of the sterile field to prevent patient surgical site infections.

References

1. *Core Curriculum for Surgical Assisting*. 2nd ed. Littleton, CO: Association of Surgical Technologists; 2006.

2. *Core Curriculum for Surgical Technology*. 5th ed. Littleton, CO: Association of Surgical Technologists; 2002.
3. Frey KB, Price B, Ross T. (2008). Asepsis and sterile technique. In: Frey KB, Ross T, eds. *Surgical Technology for the Surgical Technologist: A Positive Care Approach*. 3rd ed. Clifton Park, NY: Delmar Cengage Learning; 2008:304-376.
4. Gruendemann BJ, Mangum SS. *Infection Prevention in Surgical Settings*. Philadelphia, PA: WB Saunders; 2001.
5. Roark J. Guidelines for maintaining the sterile field. *Infection Control Today*. 2003. <http://www.infectioncontrolday.com/articles/381topics.htm>
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