



# Surgical Tech CST

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## Practice Questions

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**1. Once a sterile field has been established, which area of a sterile gown is considered sterile?**

- A. The front from chest to sterile-field level and the sleeves to two inches above the elbow
- B. The entire gown, front and back
- C. Only the gown's neckline and cuffs
- D. The back of the gown from shoulders to waist

**2. What is the minimum exposure time to achieve sterilization for wrapped items in a gravity-displacement steam sterilizer operating at 250 degrees F (121 degrees C)?**

- A. 3 minutes
- B. 30 minutes
- C. 15 minutes
- D. 10 minutes

**3. A biological indicator used to monitor steam sterilization most commonly contains spores of which organism?**

- A. Bacillus atrophaeus
- B. Clostridioides difficile
- C. Geobacillus stearothermophilus
- D. Staphylococcus aureus

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**4. If a circulator observes a break in sterile technique that no one else noticed, the correct action is to:**

- A. Ignore it if the case is nearly finished
- B. Wait until after the procedure to mention it
- C. Document it but take no action
- D. Announce and correct the contamination immediately



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**5. Ethylene oxide (EO) gas sterilization is most appropriate for which type of item?**

- A. Heat- and moisture-sensitive plastics and electronics
- B. Stainless-steel retractors
- C. Cotton towels
- D. Glass beakers

**6. Items used to set up a sterile field should be opened in what sequence relative to the time of use?**

- A. As far in advance as possible
- B. As close as possible to the time of surgery
- C. Only when the surgeon arrives
- D. The night before

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**7. When using the closed-gloving technique, the hands:**

- A. Extend fully through the gown cuffs before gloving
- B. Touch the outside of the gloves directly
- C. Remain inside the gown sleeves until the gloves are positioned
- D. Are bare when the gloves are applied

**8. An instrument that contacts intact mucous membranes but does not penetrate sterile tissue (e.g., a vaginal speculum) is classified under the Spaulding system as:**

- A. Critical
- B. Environmental
- C. Noncritical
- D. Semicritical

**9. Immediate-use steam sterilization (IUSS, formerly 'flash') is acceptable when:**

- A. A full set of backup instruments is unavailable and an item is needed urgently
- B. Routinely sterilizing implants
- C. Sterilizing items for the next day's cases
- D. Replacing terminal sterilization of all trays

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**10. Which statement about the edges of a sterile drape or wrapper is correct?**

- A. The entire drape is sterile
- B. A one-inch border around the edges is considered nonsterile
- C. The edges are sterile if not touched
- D. Only the corners are nonsterile

**11. A Class 5 chemical integrating indicator placed inside a pack is designed to:**

- A. Confirm only that the pack was exposed to heat
- B. Replace biological monitoring entirely
- C. React to all critical parameters of the sterilization cycle
- D. Identify the contents of the pack

**12. The Bowie-Dick test is performed to evaluate which function of a prevacuum (dynamic-air-removal) steam sterilizer?**

- A. Spore kill
- B. Water hardness
- C. Door-seal integrity only
- D. Adequacy of air removal and steam penetration

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**13. When performing a surgical skin prep at the incision site, the antiseptic is applied:**

- A. From the incision site outward toward the periphery
- B. From the periphery toward the incision
- C. Randomly across the field
- D. Only along the planned incision line

**14. The primary purpose of the surgical hand scrub or surgical hand rub is to:**

- A. Sterilize the hands
- B. Reduce resident and transient microorganisms to an irreducible minimum
- C. Remove only visible dirt
- D. Eliminate the need for gloves

**15. Once a sterile drape has been positioned on the patient, it should be:**

- A. Repositioned freely as needed
- B. Shifted toward the surgeon
- C. Not moved; if misplaced it is discarded and replaced
- D. Lifted and replaced from below



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**16. Peel-pouch packaging used for steam sterilization should be loaded into the sterilizer:**

- A. Flat, stacked on top of each other
- B. Plastic side down only
- C. Tightly compressed to save space
- D. On edge, paper-to-plastic

**17. Sterile team members who must change positions should pass one another:**

- A. Back to back
- B. Front to front
- C. Front to back
- D. By stepping over the field

**18. Current best practice considers the sterility of a packaged item to be:**

- A. Guaranteed for exactly 30 days
- B. Event-related, dependent on packaging integrity and handling
- C. Time-related with a fixed expiration
- D. Permanent once sterilized

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**19. Dry-heat sterilization is best suited for which of the following?**

- A. Plastic suction tubing
- B. Linen drapes
- C. Powders, oils, and petroleum-based items
- D. Fiber-optic cables

**20. If a sterile team member's glove is punctured during a procedure, the appropriate action is to:**

- A. Continue if the puncture is small
- B. Wash the glove with antiseptic
- C. Cover the glove with tape
- D. Step back, remove the glove, and reglove using sterile technique



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**21. Instruments are transported to the decontamination area and kept moist primarily to:**

- A. Prevent blood and debris from drying and hardening on surfaces
- B. Improve their appearance
- C. Lubricate the joints
- D. Cool them down

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**22. Which of the following is true regarding the height at which sterile items are considered sterile on a draped table?**

- A. Only the tabletop surface is sterile
- B. Anything that falls below table level is contaminated
- C. The table is sterile to the floor
- D. The table legs are sterile

**23. A load control number (lot number) on a sterilized package allows the facility to:**

- A. Identify the manufacturer
- B. Bill the patient
- C. Trace and recall items if a sterilization failure occurs
- D. Determine the surgeon

**24. Low-temperature hydrogen peroxide gas plasma sterilization is unsuitable for items made of:**

- A. Stainless steel
- B. Silicone
- C. Polypropylene
- D. Cellulose materials such as paper, linen, and cotton

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**25. A fundamental principle of asepsis states that a sterile item touching a nonsterile item:**

- A. Becomes contaminated
- B. Remains sterile if quickly separated
- C. Is still usable after wiping
- D. Stays sterile if the contact was brief



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**26. If a biological indicator from a routine (non-implant) steam load returns a positive (growth) result, the facility should:**

- A. Take no action
- B. Recall the load and items if possible and investigate the sterilizer
- C. Use the items anyway
- D. Re-label the load as sterile

**27. When a scrubbed person dons a sterile gown, they should pick it up by:**

- A. The outside front
- B. The sterile sleeves
- C. The inside neckline area
- D. The hem

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**28. The restricted area of the surgical suite requires personnel to wear:**

- A. Street clothes
- B. No specific attire
- C. Only a cover gown
- D. Full surgical attire including a mask when open sterile supplies are present

**29. Which three parameters must all be satisfied for effective steam sterilization?**

- A. Time, temperature, and steam (moisture) contact
- B. Pressure, color, and weight
- C. Speed, light, and pH
- D. Vacuum, sound, and density

**30. A wrapped tray removed from the steam sterilizer with visible moisture (a 'wet pack') should be:**

- A. Used immediately
- B. Considered contaminated and reprocessed
- C. Dried with a towel and used
- D. Stored until dry



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## Answer Key & Explanations

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**1. A — The front from chest to sterile-field level and the sleeves to two inches above the elbow**

A sterile gown is considered sterile only in front from the chest to the level of the sterile field and at the sleeves from two inches above the elbow to the cuff. The back and areas below the field level are not sterile.

**2. B — 30 minutes**

Gravity-displacement steam sterilization at 250 degrees F (121 degrees C) typically requires a 30-minute exposure for wrapped items, because air removal is slower than in a prevacuum cycle. Higher temperatures (270 degrees F) shorten the required time.

**3. C — Geobacillus stearothermophilus**

Geobacillus stearothermophilus spores are used to test steam and hydrogen peroxide sterilization because they are highly heat-resistant. Bacillus atrophaeus spores are used for dry-heat and ethylene oxide processes.

**4. D — Announce and correct the contamination immediately**

Surgical conscience requires that any break in sterile technique be identified and corrected immediately, regardless of who is watching. Patient safety takes priority over convenience or embarrassment.

**5. A — Heat- and moisture-sensitive plastics and electronics**

Ethylene oxide is a low-temperature chemical sterilant used for heat- and moisture-sensitive items such as plastics, electronics, and fiber-optic cables. Its drawbacks are long aeration times and toxicity.

**6. B — As close as possible to the time of surgery**

Sterile supplies should be opened as close as possible to the time of use to minimize the chance of airborne contamination. Prolonged exposure of an open field increases the risk of contamination.

**7. C — Remain inside the gown sleeves until the gloves are positioned**

In closed gloving, the scrubbed person keeps their hands inside the gown sleeves and manipulates the gloves through the fabric, so bare skin never contacts the sterile glove exterior. This reduces contamination risk during self-gloving.

**8. D — Semicritical**

Under the Spaulding classification, semicritical items contact mucous membranes or nonintact skin and require at minimum high-level disinfection. Critical items enter sterile tissue and require sterilization.

**9. A — A full set of backup instruments is unavailable and an item is needed urgently**

IUSS is reserved for situations where an item is needed immediately and no sterile replacement is available, such as a dropped instrument with no backup. It should not be used for routine processing or, ideally, for implants.

**10. B — A one-inch border around the edges is considered nonsterile**

A standard rule of sterile technique holds that a one-inch (about 2.5 cm) margin at the edge of a sterile drape



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or wrapper is considered nonsterile because it is closest to the nonsterile boundary.

**11. C — React to all critical parameters of the sterilization cycle**

Class 5 integrating indicators respond to all critical variables (time, temperature, and presence of steam) across a range of cycles. They provide more assurance than simple exposure indicators but do not replace biological indicators.

**12. D — Adequacy of air removal and steam penetration**

The Bowie-Dick test detects air leaks and confirms adequate air removal and steam penetration in a prevacuum sterilizer. It is run daily before the first processed load but is not a test of actual microbial lethality.

**13. A — From the incision site outward toward the periphery**

The skin prep is applied starting at the planned incision site and moving outward in expanding circles toward the periphery, so the cleanest area is at the incision. A sponge that reaches the periphery is discarded, never returned to the center.

**14. B — Reduce resident and transient microorganisms to an irreducible minimum**

The surgical hand scrub does not sterilize the skin; it removes debris and transient flora and reduces resident flora to a minimum, also leaving a residual antimicrobial effect. Gloves are still required because skin cannot be sterilized.

**15. C — Not moved; if misplaced it is discarded and replaced**

A drape that has been placed should not be moved because shifting it can drag nonsterile areas across the sterile field. If misplaced, it is removed and a new drape is applied, never repositioned.

**16. D — On edge, paper-to-plastic**

Peel pouches are placed on edge with paper facing plastic to allow steam contact and proper drying. Laying them flat or stacking them traps air and moisture and can cause wet packs.

**17. A — Back to back**

Sterile personnel pass each other back to back to keep sterile surfaces from contacting nonsterile backs. A sterile person also keeps their hands above waist level and within the sterile field.

**18. B — Event-related, dependent on packaging integrity and handling**

The event-related sterility concept holds that a package remains sterile until an event (tear, moisture, compromised seal) compromises it, rather than expiring on a fixed date. Packaging integrity must be inspected before use.

**19. C — Powders, oils, and petroleum-based items**

Dry-heat sterilization is used for materials that steam cannot penetrate or would damage, such as powders, anhydrous oils, and petroleum-based ointments. It requires higher temperatures and longer times than steam.

**20. D — Step back, remove the glove, and reglove using sterile technique**

A punctured glove is contaminated and must be changed. The scrubbed person steps back from the field and regloves (often with assistance using open or assisted gloving) to restore the sterile barrier.

**21. A — Prevent blood and debris from drying and hardening on surfaces**

Keeping soiled instruments moist prevents organic debris from drying onto surfaces, which would make cleaning difficult and could harbor microorganisms. Effective cleaning must occur before sterilization.



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**22. B — Anything that falls below table level is contaminated**

Only the top surface of a draped table is considered sterile; anything hanging or falling below the level of the tabletop is regarded as contaminated and must not be brought back up.

**23. C — Trace and recall items if a sterilization failure occurs**

Each sterilizer load is assigned a control/lot number so that, if a biological indicator fails or a problem is detected, every item in that load can be located and recalled. This traceability is a core quality-control practice.

**24. D — Cellulose materials such as paper, linen, and cotton**

Hydrogen peroxide gas plasma sterilization cannot process cellulose-based materials (paper, linens, cotton) because they absorb the peroxide and abort the cycle. It is well suited to many heat-sensitive metals and plastics.

**25. A — Becomes contaminated**

A core principle of aseptic technique is that sterile touching nonsterile results in contamination. There is no acceptable brief or minor contact; the item must be considered contaminated.

**26. B — Recall the load and items if possible and investigate the sterilizer**

A positive biological indicator signals a possible sterilization failure. Best practice is to recall processed items where feasible, quarantine, reprocess, and investigate/repair the sterilizer before returning it to service.

**27. C — The inside neckline area**

The gown is grasped at the inside near the neckline, allowed to unfold downward without touching nonsterile surfaces, and the arms are slid into the sleeves. Touching the outside front would risk contamination from the wearer's hands.

**28. D — Full surgical attire including a mask when open sterile supplies are present**

The restricted area (including the OR) requires full surgical attire and a surgical mask when sterile supplies are open or scrubbing/operating is underway. This minimizes microbial shedding into the sterile environment.

**29. A — Time, temperature, and steam (moisture) contact**

Steam sterilization depends on adequate exposure time, sufficient temperature, and direct contact with saturated steam (moisture). If any one parameter is inadequate, sterilization may fail even if the others are met.

**30. B — Considered contaminated and reprocessed**

Moisture provides a wicking pathway for microorganisms from the nonsterile exterior to the contents, so a wet pack is considered contaminated and must be repackaged and resterilized.



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