

**Gateway number: 13002**

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Dear Colleague,

**Health Technical Memorandum 01-05: ‘Decontamination in primary care dental practices’ and the DH/IPS Audit Tool**

The Department of Health for England is committed to improving the quality of decontamination in primary care dental practices, to ensure that patients and dental staff are receiving and providing dental care in a safe environment.

To help improve the quality of decontamination carried out locally within the dental practice, the Department:

- has issued this guidance: *Health Technical Memorandum (HTM) 01-05 – Decontamination in primary care dental practices*;
- produced a self-audit tool to complement the guidance; and
- is involved in conducting a Dental National Decontamination Survey.

I am very pleased to be sending out *HTM 01-05: Decontamination in primary care dental practices* and the accompanying audit tool as part of this initiative. As you are no doubt aware, the guidance and the question set for the audit tool have both been available on the Department’s website for some time.

I would like to thank all the members of the working group who have worked tirelessly in producing this guidance. This guidance has been the subject of extensive consultation and peer review, which included all the relevant leading and professional bodies. All working drafts were shared with key stakeholders, including the British Dental Association and we have responded to any comments received.

The guidance has taken a long time to produce; this reflects the complexities of providing decontamination guidance for primary care. Previous HTM documents have focused on the acute sector; we clearly recognised that simply imposing the same requirements on primary care

dental practices would be inappropriate, as the approach used is difficult to transfer to small-scale work.

This guidance aims to progressively raise the quality of decontamination in the primary care environment and, wherever possible, gives options in terms of approach for achieving the requirements. The aim is that all practices will have met the HTM's **essential quality requirements** within 12 months of receiving this guidance. This will include having a detailed plan showing how practices will work towards achieving **best practice**. The guidance is evidence-based where such evidence exists; however, lack of evidence in some key areas has been highlighted during the drafting process. In such instances, the Department has commissioned new research projects to inform future revisions of this document.

Initial findings from current research on contamination of decontaminated instruments has ratified our approach on the storage and packaging of sterilized instruments. To reflect this, the storage times for instruments processed in a validated vacuum sterilizer have been increased from 30 days to 60 days.

Recent policy review at the Department of Health makes clear that the previous concerns over endotoxin levels no longer prevent the use of, what the HTM refers to as, satisfactory potable water in final-stage rinse procedures.

There has also been a change in the waste regulations. Practices will need to register as producers of hazardous waste if they produce more than 500 kg of hazardous waste (the registration limit previously being 200 kg). All these changes are incorporated in this printed version.

This guidance will be of use to all dental practices, including those who have no NHS commitment. The guidance follows the essential principles given in the 'Health and Social Care Act: 2008 Code of Practice for the NHS on the prevention and control of healthcare associated infections and related guidance' (the HCAI Code of Practice). The 2009 revision of the HCAI Code of Practice makes specific reference to this HTM. By 2011, it is expected that all dental providers will be registered with the Care Quality Commission (the new regulatory organisation that will have responsibility to ensure the full range of requirements for registration are met). Compliance with this HTM should satisfy the **essential quality requirements** around the decontamination of dental equipment.

The audit tool has been developed with the Infection Prevention Society and will allow practices to assess their level of HTM compliance. The CD-ROM version, which will be available shortly, has analytical and storage capabilities that will not only allow practices to measure their current level of compliance with **essential quality requirements** and **best practice** but will also generate action plans and reports for further improvements. The CD-ROM will be sent to all NHS practices as soon as it is available.

All NHS dental practices will have received a copy of the guidance and audit tool. Practices who have no NHS commitment can request a copy from [www.orderline.dh.gov.uk](http://www.orderline.dh.gov.uk), or by e-mailing [dh@prolog.uk.com](mailto:dh@prolog.uk.com) quoting reference number 292338. The copy is limited to one per practice. Further copies can be downloaded from the Department website on:

[http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH\\_109363](http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_109363)

I have made a commitment to review this guidance within the next two years to reflect emerging evidence. Future revisions of this document will be made on the web-based version available on the above website. I am certain that practices will find this guidance and the related audit tool of great assistance in demonstrating improvements in local decontamination processes.

Yours sincerely

**Barry Cockcroft**  
**Chief Dental Officer (England)**