


What is a single-use medical device?

A single-use medical device is a critical or semi-critical medical device that is designated by the manufacturer for single-use only. This may be indicated by, but not limited to, the following terms used for labelling by the manufacturer: disposable; consumable; not for re-use or do not re-use; discard after single-use; do not use twice; or a symbol such as 

To which single-use medical devices does this policy apply?

This policy pertains to the use of critical and semi-critical medical devices that are designed for single-use.

A critical medical device is a device that penetrates the skin or mucous membranes, has contact with blood and or body fluids, or enters normally sterile cavities and therefore presents a high risk of infection if the medical device is contaminated with any organisms, including bacterial spores. Examples include but are not limited to the following: needles (including acupuncture needles), lancets, syringes, suture removal kits, urinary catheters, biopsy forceps, infusion supplies and devices such as catheters, needles, lines (e.g. IV administration tubing), solutions, and access ports.

A semi-critical medical device is a device that comes into contact with mucous membranes or non-intact skin, but ordinarily does not penetrate them. Examples include but are not limited to the following: trans-rectal probes, vaginal, nasal and rectal specula and respiratory therapy equipment (e.g. oral endotracheal tubes, airway devices, and suction devices).

A non-critical medical device refers to devices that touch only intact skin but not mucous membranes, or devices that do not directly touch the patient. Examples include but are not limited to the following: electrocardiogram (ECG) electrode patches and disposable non-sterile procedure gloves. Non-critical medical device use is beyond the scope of this policy.

Why did Alberta Health Services develop a Critical and Semi-Critical Single-Use Medical Devices policy?

To provide direction for AHS staff and physicians on the use of single-use medical devices within AHS, including contracted agencies and services. Further, the May 2011 Alberta Health Standards for Single-Use Medical Devices as Applied to Critical and Semi-Critical Medical Devices, to which this policy aligns, contains a requirement for organizations such as AHS to have a policy on the use of single-use medical devices. The policy was reviewed and updated in June 2016.

To whom does the Critical and Semi-Critical Single-Use Medical Device policy apply?

This policy applies to all Alberta Health Services employees, members of the medical staff, midwifery staff, students, volunteers, and other persons acting on behalf of or in conjunction with Alberta Health Services.

Some critical and semi-critical single-use medical devices are used repeatedly for one patient (e.g., a suction catheter). Is this appropriate under the new policy?

A suction catheter (e.g., Yankauer catheter tip) is considered a single patient-use medical device which means the device has been developed for use and reuse with a single patient, but should not be reused with different patients. Other examples of single patient-use medical devices are nebulizers, metered dose inhaler spacers, and infant oxygen sensors.

Are there any differences between current practices and the use of single-use medical devices with the new policy?

No, the policy is based on current best practice standards in the use of single-use medical devices and aligns with the 2008 Alberta Health Standards for Single-Use Medical Devices, which was updated and re-released in 2011.

What happens to existing policies pertaining to single-use medical devices?

Any policies from former legacy health entities related to single-use medical devices have been replaced by the updated Alberta Health Services Critical and Semi-Critical Single-Use Medical Device policy. For more information as to which policies have been replaced please visit the clinical policy webpage.

If I become aware of the use of a single-use medical device that is not in accordance with this policy, who can I turn to for help?

In all clinical settings there are experts to help answer questions on the appropriate use of single-use medical devices. You should contact one or more of the following:

- Medical Device Reprocessing staff at the facility
- Infection Prevention and Control staff at the facility. General inquiries can be made by contacting infectionpreventioncontrol@albertahealthservices.ca
- Operational administrative leaders, including Directors and Vice-Presidents
- Medical staff and medical leaders
- Administrator on call for your facility or zone.

The inappropriate use of a single-use medical device in patient care is considered an Adverse Event as this use could lead to transmission of microorganisms or result in injury to a patient. For more information on the management and reporting of Adverse Events, please visit the AHS Reporting and Learning System (RLS) webpage <http://insite.albertahealthservices.ca/1820.asp>

Where can I find out more information regarding the use of single-use medical devices and this policy?

For more information on this policy and the use of single-use medical devices, please visit the clinical policy website <http://insite.albertahealthservices.ca/1495.asp>

Or you can contact:

- Medical Device Reprocessing staff at your facility
- Infection Prevention & Control staff at your facility or by emailing infectionpreventioncontrol@albertahealthservices.ca