

Sterile Dressing Pack Guidance

Guidance regarding the use of sterile dressing packs for wound care procedures in Primary Care

Sterile dressing packs

Dressing packs are single-use sterile kit containing disposable components and are often used when performing wound care. Their role is to provide a clean or sterile working surface and offer convenience by containing equipment required including gloves, apron, sterile field, waste bag and gauze swabs. Dressing packs are frequently used when not clinically indicated or for non-wound care related procedures.

Sustainability

Single-use dressing packs contribute to a significant volume of non-recyclable clinical waste. Often not all the items of a dressing pack are required, or a pack is opened as extra items such as gloves or gauze are needed leading to the rest of the contents being thrown away unused.

When is a sterile dressing pack required for wound care?

NICE clinical guideline (CG139) and NHS England (Standard infection control precautions) advise the use of disposable gloves when exposed to non-intact skin and the use of single-use aprons to protect uniform or clothing from contamination. There is no recommendation in either guideline on the specific use of sterile dressing packs for performing wound care.

A dressing pack should only be used to undertake a wound care procedure that requires sterile ANTT (Aseptic Non-Touch Technique) where components must be introduced into the aseptic field and sterile gloves must be used or in a community setting where a clean surface is not available to allow the procedure to be carried out safely.

For the management of most simple or chronic wounds a clean or standard ANTT is required. A clean technique uses the same principles as an aseptic technique, where some equipment used in the procedure is clean but not sterile. This technique is suitable for most primary care environments, and the focus is on good hand hygiene, maintaining a clean environment, the use of clean non-sterile gloves, sterile dressings, sterile equipment and avoiding contamination by not touching key parts such as the surface of the sterile dressing or other items that will be in contact with the wound site. Non-sterile gloves must be clean and taken directly from their original box, and the inner surface of the opened dressing packaging can be used as a sterile field.

To decide if a sterile ANTT using a dressing pack is required clinicians should assess the individual patient, the wound and the surrounding environment.

Recommendations when a clean ANTT or sterile ANTT would be clinically indicated for wound care. Please note that this is not an exhaustive list and should not replace clinical judgement.

	Clean ANTT	Sterile ANTT
Gloves	Non-sterile	Sterile
Dressings	Sterile	Sterile
Cleansing solution	Tap water or Saline	Saline or Prontosan (only if clinically indicated)
Patient factors	Patient is not high risk of infection	Patient is immunocompromised, diabetic or high risk of infection
Wound	Chronic wounds healing by secondary intention, leg ulcers, pressure ulcers, removal of sutures No active wound infection Size – small Depth – superficial	Acute wounds less than 48 hours old, surgical wounds, burns, trauma wounds Active wound infection Size - large / extensive wound Depth – sinus or cavity with exposed structures
Wound care procedure	Small number of key-parts Washing of lower limbs in lined bowl/bucket Applying topical preparations to intact skin; emollients, barrier cream, topical steroids.	Large or numerous key-parts involved or direct contact with key-parts Conservative sharp debridement Application of Negative Pressure Wound Therapy (NPWT)
Length of procedure	Less than 20 minutes	More than 20 minutes
Environment	Clean surface available	Clean surface is not available

Summary

Sterile dressing packs are a tool for performing wound care, offering disposable items and do not contain products that will be applied directly to the wound. They should only be used when clinically indicated and considered necessary to perform wound care dressing procedure using sterile ANTT, with minimal waste of pack contents. Providers are accountable for preventing and controlling the spread of infection. Any care setting providing wound care are required to supply personal protective equipment (including sterile dressing packs if required). Dressing packs obtained via the direct supply route should only be used for wound care related procedures. All equipment must be used, stored and maintained in line with manufacturers' instructions and be available when needed.

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