

Healthcare Sterile Processing Association (HSPA) Certification Practice Exam (Sample)

Study Guide



Everything you need from our exam experts!

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Introduction

Preparing for a certification exam can feel overwhelming, but with the right tools, it becomes an opportunity to build confidence, sharpen your skills, and move one step closer to your goals. At Examzify, we believe that effective exam preparation isn't just about memorization, it's about understanding the material, identifying knowledge gaps, and building the test-taking strategies that lead to success.

This guide was designed to help you do exactly that.

Whether you're preparing for a licensing exam, professional certification, or entry-level qualification, this book offers structured practice to reinforce key concepts. You'll find a wide range of multiple-choice questions, each followed by clear explanations to help you understand not just the right answer, but why it's correct.

The content in this guide is based on real-world exam objectives and aligned with the types of questions and topics commonly found on official tests. It's ideal for learners who want to:

- Practice answering questions under realistic conditions,
- Improve accuracy and speed,
- Review explanations to strengthen weak areas, and
- Approach the exam with greater confidence.

We recommend using this book not as a stand-alone study tool, but alongside other resources like flashcards, textbooks, or hands-on training. For best results, we recommend working through each question, reflecting on the explanation provided, and revisiting the topics that challenge you most.

Remember: successful test preparation isn't about getting every question right the first time, it's about learning from your mistakes and improving over time. Stay focused, trust the process, and know that every page you turn brings you closer to success.

Let's begin.

How to Use This Guide

This guide is designed to help you study more effectively and approach your exam with confidence. Whether you're reviewing for the first time or doing a final refresh, here's how to get the most out of your Examzify study guide:

1. Start with a Diagnostic Review

Skim through the questions to get a sense of what you know and what you need to focus on. Your goal is to identify knowledge gaps early.

2. Study in Short, Focused Sessions

Break your study time into manageable blocks (e.g. 30 – 45 minutes). Review a handful of questions, reflect on the explanations.

3. Learn from the Explanations

After answering a question, always read the explanation, even if you got it right. It reinforces key points, corrects misunderstandings, and teaches subtle distinctions between similar answers.

4. Track Your Progress

Use bookmarks or notes (if reading digitally) to mark difficult questions. Revisit these regularly and track improvements over time.

5. Simulate the Real Exam

Once you're comfortable, try taking a full set of questions without pausing. Set a timer and simulate test-day conditions to build confidence and time management skills.

6. Repeat and Review

Don't just study once, repetition builds retention. Re-attempt questions after a few days and revisit explanations to reinforce learning. Pair this guide with other Examzify tools like flashcards, and digital practice tests to strengthen your preparation across formats.

There's no single right way to study, but consistent, thoughtful effort always wins. Use this guide flexibly, adapt the tips above to fit your pace and learning style. You've got this!

Questions

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- 1. Which of the following is classified as a high-level disinfectant?**
 - A. Alcohol
 - B. Chlorine
 - C. Glutaraldehyde and ortho-phthalaldehydes
 - D. Hydrogen peroxide

- 2. Which of the following is NOT a method of sterilization?**
 - A. Steam sterilization
 - B. Cold sterilization
 - C. Disinfection
 - D. Gas sterilization

- 3. What type of chemicals are used on living tissue to inhibit the growth of microorganisms?**
 - A. Disinfectants
 - B. Antiseptics
 - C. Sterilants
 - D. Preservatives

- 4. What method of sterilization utilizes ethylene oxide gas?**
 - A. Dry heat sterilization
 - B. Steam sterilization
 - C. Gas sterilization
 - D. Radiation sterilization

- 5. What surgical procedure involves the removal of the uterus?**
 - A. Laparoscopy
 - B. Hysterectomy
 - C. Cholecystectomy
 - D. Appendectomy

- 6. What type of enzymes are used to breakdown fatty tissue on instruments?**
 - A. Proteases
 - B. Amylases
 - C. Lipase enzymes
 - D. Cellulases

7. Which aspect is NOT a responsibility of a sterile processing technician?

- A. Cleaning used instruments
- B. Conducting patient surgeries
- C. Packaging instruments for sterilization
- D. Performing quality control checks

8. Which three phases are part of a terminal steam sterilizer cycle?

- A. Preparation, exposure, and cooling
- B. Conditioning, exposure, and exhaust
- C. Loading, heating, and drying
- D. Conditioning, exposure, and cooling

9. What is the primary role of access control in the sterile processing department?

- A. To manage payroll for staff
- B. To restrict entry and maintain a sterile environment
- C. To schedule maintenance for equipment
- D. To monitor staff performance reviews

10. What does "aseptic technique" primarily aim to achieve?

- A. To increase the rate of surgical procedures
- B. To improve patient comfort during medical procedures
- C. To prevent contamination during medical procedures
- D. To ensure the effectiveness of medical imaging

Answers

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1. C
2. C
3. B
4. C
5. B
6. C
7. B
8. B
9. B
10. C

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Explanations

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1. Which of the following is classified as a high-level disinfectant?

- A. Alcohol
- B. Chlorine
- C. Glutaraldehyde and ortho-phthalaldehydes**
- D. Hydrogen peroxide

High-level disinfectants are capable of destroying most bacteria, viruses, and fungi, and can even eliminate some bacterial spores. This makes them suitable for use on items that cannot be heat-sterilized but still require a high level of disinfection, such as certain medical instruments. Glutaraldehyde and ortho-phthalaldehydes fit this classification because they have well-documented efficacy against a broad spectrum of microorganisms, including spores at the appropriate concentrations and exposure times. They are commonly used in the healthcare setting for disinfecting semi-critical items, such as flexible endoscopes, which require high-level disinfection. On the other hand, while alcohol, chlorine, and hydrogen peroxide can have varying disinfectant properties, they are not classified as high-level disinfectants under all circumstances. Alcohol is generally considered an intermediate-level disinfectant and is effective against bacteria and some viruses but not reliable against spores. Chlorine is typically used as a disinfectant as well, but its effectiveness largely depends on concentration and conditions. Hydrogen peroxide is also used for disinfection; however, it primarily functions as an intermediate-level disinfectant unless used at higher concentrations specifically formulated for high-level disinfection. Therefore, glutaraldehyde and ortho-phthalaldehydes

2. Which of the following is NOT a method of sterilization?

- A. Steam sterilization
- B. Cold sterilization
- C. Disinfection**
- D. Gas sterilization

Disinfection is the process of destroying or inactivating most microorganisms on a surface or in a substance, but it does not achieve the level of sterility that is required for items used in sterile environments, such as surgical instruments. Sterilization, in contrast, is the complete elimination of all forms of microbial life, including spores. Steam sterilization, cold sterilization, and gas sterilization are all methods designed to achieve this complete elimination of microorganisms. Steam sterilization utilizes high-pressure steam to destroy pathogens, cold sterilization often involves the use of chemical solutions to sterilize instruments at lower temperatures, and gas sterilization typically uses ethylene oxide or other gases to decontaminate heat-sensitive items. In clinical and healthcare settings, distinguishing between disinfection and sterilization is crucial for ensuring patient safety and infection control.

3. What type of chemicals are used on living tissue to inhibit the growth of microorganisms?

- A. Disinfectants
- B. Antiseptics**
- C. Sterilants
- D. Preservatives

Antiseptics are specifically designed for use on living tissues, aiming to reduce or inhibit the growth of microorganisms to prevent infections. They work by targeting the cellular processes of microbes, effectively reducing their numbers or inhibiting their function while being safe for human tissues. This makes them particularly valuable in medical and clinical settings for procedures such as wound care, surgical prep, and hand hygiene. Disinfectants, on the other hand, are intended for non-living surfaces and are often too harsh for direct application on living tissue, as they can cause damage. Sterilants are strong agents used to achieve complete elimination of all microorganisms, often reserved for surgical instruments and other items that come into contact with patients but not for direct application to living tissue. Preservatives, while they may inhibit microbial growth, are generally used in products to prolong shelf-life and are not specifically formulated or intended for use directly on living tissues. Thus, antiseptics are the appropriate choice for the context of inhibiting microbial growth on living tissue.

4. What method of sterilization utilizes ethylene oxide gas?

- A. Dry heat sterilization
- B. Steam sterilization
- C. Gas sterilization**
- D. Radiation sterilization

Ethylene oxide gas is a well-known method used for gas sterilization. This technique is particularly beneficial for sterilizing items that are moisture-sensitive or cannot withstand high temperatures, making it an ideal choice for sterilizing medical devices that are delicate or made from various materials, including plastics and electronics. Gas sterilization using ethylene oxide involves sealing items in a chamber where the gas is introduced. The ethylene oxide penetrates the items, effectively killing bacteria, viruses, and other microorganisms. This method is highly effective, versatile, and can be used for a wide range of materials and devices. In contrast, the other methods mentioned serve different purposes or utilize different mechanisms. Dry heat sterilization relies on high temperatures to destroy microorganisms, while steam sterilization utilizes saturated steam under pressure to achieve the same goal. Radiation sterilization involves the use of ionizing radiation to eradicate pathogens, which is different from gas sterilization. Thus, ethylene oxide gas specifically aligns with the definition and process of gas sterilization.

5. What surgical procedure involves the removal of the uterus?

- A. Laparoscopy
- B. Hysterectomy**
- C. Cholecystectomy
- D. Appendectomy

The surgical procedure that involves the removal of the uterus is a hysterectomy. This operation can be performed for various medical reasons, including uterine fibroids, abnormal bleeding, endometriosis, or cancer. During the procedure, not just the uterus is removed; the surgeon may also remove surrounding structures such as the cervix, ovaries, or fallopian tubes, depending on the specific case and the underlying condition being treated. Laparoscopy refers to a minimally invasive surgical technique used to visualize or operate on internal organs via small incisions, including procedures like hysterectomy, but it does not specifically indicate the removal of the uterus itself. Cholecystectomy is the removal of the gallbladder, primarily performed for gallstones or gallbladder disease. Appendectomy is the surgical removal of the appendix, commonly done to treat appendicitis. Each of these procedures targets different organs and conditions, while hysterectomy is specifically focused on the uterus.

6. What type of enzymes are used to breakdown fatty tissue on instruments?

- A. Proteases
- B. Amylases
- C. Lipase enzymes**
- D. Cellulases

The use of lipase enzymes is specifically targeted at breaking down fatty tissue due to their ability to chemically cleave the bonds of lipids (fats). In the context of sterile processing, instruments can often come into contact with organic materials like fats and oils, which can be challenging to remove if not addressed appropriately. Lipase enzymes facilitate the digestion of triglycerides and other lipid molecules, making them essential for the effective cleaning of surgical instruments that may be contaminated with fatty substances like blood or tissue. Their unique biochemical properties allow them to emulsify fats, transforming them into smaller, more manageable molecules that can then be easily rinsed away. In contrast, proteases are focused on breaking down proteins, amylases are meant for carbohydrates, particularly starches, and cellulases target cellulose, which is a component of plant materials. None of these enzyme types have the function or specificity necessary for addressing lipid-based residues effectively, which highlights why lipase enzymes are the appropriate choice for this specific task in sterile processing.

7. Which aspect is NOT a responsibility of a sterile processing technician?

- A. Cleaning used instruments
- B. Conducting patient surgeries**
- C. Packaging instruments for sterilization
- D. Performing quality control checks

The responsibility of conducting patient surgeries does not fall under the scope of a sterile processing technician's role. Sterile processing technicians are integral to the healthcare team, but their primary functions focus on the proper handling, cleaning, sterilization, and organization of surgical instruments and medical equipment. They are tasked with cleaning used instruments, packaging them appropriately for sterilization, and performing quality control checks to ensure that the instruments meet safety and sterility standards before they are sent to the surgical team. In contrast, conducting patient surgeries is a role designated to trained surgeons and doctors who have the necessary medical training and expertise to perform such procedures. Sterile processing technicians support the surgical process indirectly by ensuring that all instruments are sterile and ready for use, but they do not participate directly in surgeries. This distinction is crucial in understanding the specific responsibilities and roles within a healthcare setting.

8. Which three phases are part of a terminal steam sterilizer cycle?

- A. Preparation, exposure, and cooling
- B. Conditioning, exposure, and exhaust**
- C. Loading, heating, and drying
- D. Conditioning, exposure, and cooling

The phases of a terminal steam sterilizer cycle are critical to ensuring the effective sterilization of medical instruments. The correct three phases are conditioning, exposure, and exhaust. Conditioning is the initial phase where steam is introduced into the sterilizer and the load is brought to a temperature where it can accept steam effectively. This phase is essential for removing air from the sterilization chamber and ensuring that steam can reach all surfaces of the items being sterilized. Exposure is the phase where the items are held at the required temperature and pressure for a specified period of time. This is the critical moment when the actual sterilization takes place, ensuring that microorganisms are killed effectively. Exhaust is the final phase of the cycle where the steam is evacuated from the chamber, and the sterilized items are cooled down. Proper exhaust helps to ensure that excess moisture is removed from the sterilized items, which is important to prevent re-contamination and ensure the integrity of the instruments. The other options do not accurately reflect the complete and correct phases of a terminal steam sterilizer cycle, as they either include incorrect steps or incomplete processes. Understanding these phases is essential for any professional in sterile processing to ensure the safe and effective sterilization of surgical instruments.

9. What is the primary role of access control in the sterile processing department?

- A. To manage payroll for staff
- B. To restrict entry and maintain a sterile environment**
- C. To schedule maintenance for equipment
- D. To monitor staff performance reviews

The primary role of access control in the sterile processing department is to restrict entry and maintain a sterile environment. This function is crucial because a sterile processing department deals with the preparation, decontamination, and sterilization of medical instruments and devices intended for use in healthcare settings. By controlling who can enter the area, facilities ensure that only trained personnel are involved in handling sterile instruments, which helps minimize the risk of contamination and safeguards patient safety. Access control involves implementing protocols and technologies, such as card access systems, door locks, or security personnel, to prevent unauthorized individuals from entering areas where sterile processing occurs. This not only helps maintain the integrity of the sterile field but also ensures compliance with regulatory standards related to infection prevention. While other options may describe important functions within a healthcare organization, they do not directly relate to the critical function of maintaining a controlled and sterile environment in the sterile processing department.

10. What does "aseptic technique" primarily aim to achieve?

- A. To increase the rate of surgical procedures
- B. To improve patient comfort during medical procedures
- C. To prevent contamination during medical procedures**
- D. To ensure the effectiveness of medical imaging

Aseptic technique primarily aims to prevent contamination during medical procedures. This practice is essential in healthcare settings, particularly in surgery and other invasive procedures, to minimize the risk of infection. By maintaining a sterile environment and utilizing proper protocols, healthcare providers can safeguard patients against pathogens that could lead to postoperative infections or other complications. The key principles of aseptic technique involve meticulous hand hygiene, effective use of personal protective equipment (PPE), and the sterilization of instruments and materials. These measures collectively contribute to the effectiveness of the procedures performed, ensuring the safety and well-being of the patients. The other options do not align with the primary goal of aseptic technique. While increasing the rate of surgical procedures or improving patient comfort are relevant to the broader context of healthcare delivery, they do not encapsulate the core purpose of maintaining sterility. Similarly, ensuring the effectiveness of medical imaging is not related to aseptic procedures, as imaging does not typically involve direct contact with sterile tissues or environments.

Next Steps

Congratulations on reaching the final section of this guide. You've taken a meaningful step toward passing your certification exam and advancing your career.

As you continue preparing, remember that consistent practice, review, and self-reflection are key to success. Make time to revisit difficult topics, simulate exam conditions, and track your progress along the way.

If you need help, have suggestions, or want to share feedback, we'd love to hear from you. Reach out to our team at hello@examzify.com.

Or visit your dedicated course page for more study tools and resources:

<https://hspacert.examzify.com>

We wish you the very best on your exam journey. You've got this!

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