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## Safety Notice

SN:002

September 2006

**Distributed to:**

- Chief Executives
- Directors of Clinical Operations
- Directors of Clinical Governance
- Director, Private Health Care Branch

**Action required by:**

- All Area Health Services
- Private Hospitals and Day Procedure Centres

**Further information**

NSW Department of Health  
Healthcare Associated Infection  
Prevention & Control Unit  
Tel 02 9391 9275

Or

NSW Infection Control  
Resource Centre  
Tel 02 9332 9712

Email  
quality@doh.health.nsw.gov.au

Website  
<http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/quality/sabs/register.html>

## Cleaning of flexible endoscopes (reprocessing)

**Identification of all channels**

The information in this Safety Notice reinforces the NSW Department of Health's *Infection Control Policy (PD2005\_247)* (see [http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/policies/PD/2005/PD2005\\_247.html](http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/policies/PD/2005/PD2005_247.html))

**Issue**

Despite the use of standard cleaning and disinfection techniques required to decontaminate endoscopes, there have been Reportable Incident Briefs (RIBs) that identify breaches due to:

- the complex channel and valve systems within the endoscope resulting in a failure of staff to follow the manufacturer's instructions
- inadequate reprocessing of endoscopes
- contaminated endoscopes used on patients that have resulted in look-back exercises.

Protein debris can become fixed and induce biofilm on the channel of endoscopes if the manual cleaning, brushing and rinsing steps are not completed during the reprocessing procedures.

Inadequate reprocessing can result in transmission of pathogens to patients during endoscopic procedures. To prevent transmission of infections, recommended cleaning and disinfection/sterilisation procedures must be followed for flexible endoscopes.

**The critical steps for reprocessing flexible endoscopes**

1. Identify brand and model for each endoscope.
2. Obtain the manufacturer's instructions for all brands and models.
3. Understand the manufacturer's instructions for cleaning each endoscope.
4. Be aware of the number of channels and valves within the endoscope.
5. Adhere to the manufacturer's instructions for reprocessing.
6. Evaluate the reprocessing procedures.

**Recommended actions**

- Staff must review and comply with the manufacturer's instructions for reprocessing flexible endoscopes.
- All channels of the flexible endoscope must be reprocessed, whether or not they are used during a procedure.
- All loan equipment must be reprocessed prior to use and prior to return to the manufacturer.

**Suggested actions for Area Health Services and private health care facilities / day procedure centres**

1. Ensure that this Safety Notice is distributed to all relevant stakeholders.
2. Ensure that policies and protocols are updated to include this information.
3. Ensure that staff who are responsible for reprocessing flexible endoscopes obtain and follow the manufacturer's instructions for all brands and models of flexible endoscopes.