



Nipple shields: Clean Vs Sterile

Nipple shields are a useful tool in many breastfeeding situations. The type of patient contact and how the device is used is a critical aspect of how to clean a device or how clean the device should be at time of use. The classification of the device is dependent on the contact: does the device come in contact with mucous membranes, or sterile cavities, or only skin contact? Nipple shields only come into contact via the skin.

Many hospitals and health boards have a list of recommended practices which outline the requirements for equipment and devices that come into contact with patients and this document does not replace policy or procedures in place, ***this is for information only.***

The classifications are as follows:

Non-critical

Non-critical items are those that have skin contact only, or do not enter sterile body cavities or mucous membranes. (Nipple Shields fall into this category)

Other Classifications:

Semi-critical - Semi-critical devices contact mucous membranes, but do not contact sterile cavities.

Critical - Critical items are those that come into contact with sterile bodies, are implantable and so forth. Sterilization is required.

Often we use sterile and clean as synonyms. In the medical and pharmaceutical industries, the terms "sterile" and "clean" hold very distinct meanings. Clean refers to limiting the growth of microorganisms whereas sterile means the elimination of all microorganisms (spores, viruses, bacteria, etc.) Clean is typically used for more routine and non-invasive procedures, while sterile is used for invasive procedures.

What are clean nipple shields?

A clean shield is one that doesn't have marks, stains, or dirt and debris present. Clean can be used in certain medical scenarios where patients are not at a high risk of infection.

Clean items typically come packaged in bulk, or in single packages that are clean but not sterile. Clean items can potentially be sterilized if the situation requires a sterile shield such as a very high risk NICU patient.

What are sterile nipple shields?

Sterile nipple shields are free from bacteria or other living microorganisms; totally clean in a package that has a date of expiration for guaranteed sterility. Sterile goes a step further than clean. When an item is sterile, there is no micro-life form that has the potential to reproduce and spread dangerous germs or bacteria. Sterile items are used in operating rooms and other medical environments where there is a high risk of infection.

Cleaning And Disinfection of Nipple Shields:

Boiling Water:

1. Place in boiling water for 20 minutes.
2. Remove safely from boiling water.
3. Air dry on clean surface.

Hand Wash:

1. Clean using warm, soapy water.
2. Rinse using clean water.
3. Air dry on clean surface.

Ameda CleanEase Steam Sanitization bags:

1. Rinse using clean water
2. Place in Steam bag and follow instructions. Add 60 ml of water to bag prior to placing in the microwave.

The time duration required to ensure thorough sanitization depends on the wattage of the microwave. Please refer to microwave manufacturer's instruction manual for information on wattage and power.

The duration for use is as below:

- >1100W = 1.5 minutes
- 800-1100W = 3 minutes
- 600-750W = 5 minutes

**These are general recommendations and may be amended to meet hospital protocols.*