

Home > Explore roles > Healthcare science > Roles in healthcare science > Physical sciences and biomedical engineering > Decontamination and sterile services

Decontamination and sterile services

Decontamination science manages all risks associated with health care acquired infections (HCAI) in the reprocessing of reusable medical devices.

This page has information on the role of decontamination science in the NHS, including entry requirements and skills needed.

Working life

Staff working in decontamination science are responsible for ensuring that reusable medical devices, such as endoscopes and other surgical devices eg instruments and equipment are cleaned, sterilized and repackaged to high standards, ready for reusing in operating theatres and other areas of health care.



Re-useable medical devices are used in different areas of healthcare, including operating theatres, clinics, accident and emergency departments and wards. These devices include:



- endoscopes (instruments used to examine the interior of the body) – which may be flexible or rigid
- scalpel handles
- artery forceps
- orthopaedic drills
- dental instruments
- medical devices used in plastic or eye surgery

As these various devices will have been used before they reach the department, they may contain skin tissue, blood and other bodily fluids. So you will wear personal protective equipment while you're working.

As a decontamination technician (sometimes known as a sterile services technician, sterile services assistant), you'll work with a variety of medical devices under limited supervision within strict guidelines and procedures.

For each medical device, you will be responsible for:

Re-useable medical devices are used in different areas of healthcare, including operating theatres, clinics, A&E departments and wards

- disassembling
- cleaning
- disinfecting
- checking
- reassembling
- packaging
- sterilising
- despatching
- and tracking the device, in a controlled environment.

For some of these tasks, you'll use highly sophisticated and automated equipment, and for others you'll use hand tools. You may be handling hot trays of equipment/medical devices as they come out of sterilising machines.

As an apprentice [1] decontamination technician, you'll do many of the basic tasks listed above and assist decontamination technicians under supervision.

As a decontamination technician, you'll also be involved in the training of more junior staff within the department.

Want to learn more?

- Find out about the entry requirements and skills required to work as a decontamination technician [2]
- Find out about the training you'll receive for a career as a decontamination technician [3]

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| Pay and conditions | Expand / collapse |
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Most jobs in the NHS are covered by the Agenda for Change (AfC) [4] pay scales. This pay system covers all staff except doctors, dentists and the most senior managers. Apprentice Decontamination technicians will typically start on AfC [5] band 2, with opportunities to progress to technician and supervisory level posts at band 3 and band 4. Staff in the NHS will usually work a standard 37.5 hours per week. They may work a shift pattern.

Terms and conditions of service can vary for employers outside the NHS.

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| Where the role can lead | Expand / collapse |
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With further training and/or experience, you may be able to develop your career further and apply for vacancies as a senior endoscopy [6] decontamination technician, decontamination technician supervisor or manager in a decontamination sciences department [7]. There are also opportunities in teaching and in research.

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| Job market and vacancies | Expand / collapse |
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Job market information

There are over 200 hundred sterile services departments in England (an average sterile services department will employ 30 staff), with the majority working within the NHS and some working within the Private Sector. There are also 480+ dental practices undertaking the decontamination of re-usable medical devices and staff undertaking the decontamination of dental medical devices will require the same level of education as both sterile services and endoscopy [6] decontamination staff.

Endoscopy [6] departments may employ decontamination technicians in what was previously seen as a nursing role to decontaminate flexible endoscopes and request the on-site decontamination managers to run the decontamination aspect of their service, and there are some instances whereby a separate decontamination facility for flexible endoscopes have been developed under the managerial role of the decontamination manager.

There are 215 endoscopy [6] units in secondary care [8], 36 known community endoscopy [6] units and 97 endoscopy [6] units in the independent sector

Finding and applying for jobs

When you're looking for job or apprenticeship vacancies, there are a number of sources you can use, depending on the type of work you're seeking.

Check vacancies carefully to be sure you can meet the requirements of the person specification before applying and to find out what the application process is. You may need to apply online or send a C.V. for example.

Key sources relevant to vacancies in the health sector:

- vacancies in organisations delivering NHS healthcare can be found on the NHS Jobs website [9]
- vacancies in local government can be found on the Local Government Jobs website [10] and the Jobs Go Public website [11]
- vacancies for apprenticeships appear on the Gov.uk website [12]

As well as these sources, you may find suitable vacancies in the health sector by contacting local employers directly, searching in local newspapers and by using the Universal Jobmatch tool [13].

Find out more about applications and interviews [14]

Volunteering is an excellent way of gaining experience (especially if you don't have enough for a specific paid job you're interested in) and also seeing whether you're suited to a particular type of work. It's also a great way to boost your confidence and you can give something back to the community.

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Further information

Expand / collapse

- Association for Perioperative Practice [15]
- British Society of Gastroenterology [16]
- Central Sterilising Club [17]
- Infection Prevention Society [18]
- Institute of Decontamination Sciences [19]
- Institute of Healthcare Engineering and Estate Management [20]

Other roles that may interest you

- Medical engineering [21]
- Operating department practitioner [22]
- Theatre nurse [23]
- Experienced paramedic [24]

Source URL: <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/healthcare-science/roles-healthcare-science/physical-sciences-and-biomedical-engineering/decontamination-and-sterile-services>

Links

[1] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/i-am/secondary-school-or-fe-college/apprenticeships-traineeships-and-cadet-schemes>

[2] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/physical-sciences-and-biomechanical-engineering/decontamination-and-sterile-services/entry-requirements-and>

[3] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/physical-sciences-and-biomechanical-engineering/decontamination-and-sterile-services/training-and-development>

[4] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/about/careers-nhs/nhs-pay-and-benefits/agenda-change-pay-rates>

[5] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#AfC>

[6] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Endoscopy>

- [7] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/operational-management/decontamination-services-management>
- [8] https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Secondary_care
- [9] <http://www.jobs.nhs.uk>
- [10] <http://www.lgjobs.com/>
- [11] <http://www.jobsgopublic.com/>
- [12] <https://www.gov.uk/apply-apprenticeship>
- [13] <https://www.gov.uk/jobsearch>
- [14] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/career-planning/planning-your-career/applications-and-interviews>
- [15] <http://www.afpp.org.uk/>
- [16] <http://www.bsg.org.uk/>
- [17] <http://www.csc.org.uk/>
- [18] <http://www.ips.uk.net/>
- [19] <http://www.idsc-uk.co.uk/index.php>
- [20] <http://www.iheem.org.uk/>
- [21] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/healthcare-science/roles-healthcare-science/physical-sciences-and-biomedical-engineering/medical-engineering>
- [22] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/allied-health-professionals/roles-allied-health-professions/operating-department-practitioner>
- [23] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/nursing/roles-nursing/theatre-nurse>
- [24] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/ambulance-service-team/roles-ambulance-service/experienced-paramedic>