

# Why sterilisation is necessary

As if you didn't already have enough to do as a new mum or dad, sterilising your baby's feeding equipment is one of those little jobs there's no getting away from. Forgetting to properly clean and sterilise your baby's feeding equipment can lead to tummy upset, diarrhoea and an unhappy baby and mother.

We frequently get questions from parents about their baby's immune system and sterilisation. Dr. Gray has the answers:

**Isn't it important to expose my baby to bacteria early on? I've heard that she may become ill more easily if I try to protect her too much.**

"It is indeed important that your baby starts building up her own immune system. However, sterilisation of your feeding equipment does not prevent her from building up her immune system. She will gradually get exposed to bacteria in your household and her immune system will learn how to cope with these bacteria. This is probably much healthier for your baby than possibly ingesting very large numbers of bacteria that have multiplied in unclean feeding equipment. Sterilisation of feeding equipment also helps protect your baby from particularly harmful bacteria and other types of germs that can be present in tap water or milk, or sometimes even on your hands. Even small numbers of these germs can make your baby ill, so it makes sense to protect your baby from them at this early age."

**If I sterilise all my feeding equipment will this also get rid of the good bacteria?**

"It is fine if your baby feeding equipment do not have any bacteria on them after sterilisation. Your baby will receive their supply of good bacteria through their diet."

**Is sterilisation really necessary in areas where tap water is safe to drink?**

"In areas where tap water is safe to drink the risk to your baby will be lower than in areas where tap water is not safe to drink. However, your baby's immune system is very immature in the first year and safe tap water for an adult is not always as safe for a young baby. In most developed countries the government or municipality regulates drinking water with the goal of establishing an "acceptable health risk" for the general public, which means the average healthy adult will not become ill. Infants have weaker immune systems than the average adult, which means that extra care should be taken when using tap water.

Also keep in mind that harmful bacteria can be transferred from your hands or from milk remains in the bottle. Thorough washing of your hands and the baby feeding products will help reduce this risk, but sterilising will make sure that any remaining bacteria are killed."

**Now that my baby is sitting and crawling by herself, does it become pointless to sterilise the bottles, teats, soothers and**



**Dr. Jim Gray** from the Birmingham Children's Hospital in the United Kingdom explains why sterilising your baby feeding equipment is so important.

"In spite of worldwide improvements in living conditions, infant infections are still far too common, both in developing and developed countries. They can lead to symptoms like acute sickness and diarrhoea and may even require hospitalisation. It's important to know that the bacteria that cause such diseases can be spread via tap water; milk remains in the bottle or unwashed hands that come into contact with food or feeding equipment. While an adult is more capable of fighting off such infections, a baby's immune system is still very immature in its first year. Sterilising your baby feeding equipment and thoroughly

washing your hands before preparing your baby's feed will help protect your baby and prevent such infections. By the time your baby has her first birthday her immune system will be strong enough to protect her from common germs, so sterilisation is no longer needed."



**breast pump, especially since she often puts objects in her mouth that have been lying on the floor?**

"No, we recommend that you continue to sterilise even when your baby starts to crawl and pick up objects from the floor. Your baby is likely to swallow many more bacteria from unclean feeding products than she will encounter while crawling on the floor. Also, some of the types of bacteria that might be found in feeding products are potentially more harmful than the bacteria she is likely to encounter while crawling on the floor."

**Can I use the dishwasher to sterilise my baby's bottles?**

"Most dishwashers will not get hot enough to sterilise your baby's bottles. Research has shown that you need temperatures of at least 90 degrees Celsius (195 degrees Fahrenheit) in all parts of the device to quickly and reliably kill all the bacteria that most commonly affect babies. Using a baby bottle steriliser ensures the right temperatures are reached."

**Which items should I sterilise?**

"To protect your baby from illness make sure you sterilise all feeding equipment for the first 6 months. If you have introduced solids before 6 months it is wise to sterilise the bowls and spoons. After that time only milk feeding equipment like bottles and breast pumps need to be sterilised until your child is one year old."

**When can I stop sterilising?**

"We recommend that you continue to sterilise until your child is one year old."

