

# Autoclave Safety

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Steam sterilization has been an indispensable tool in biological research since Pasteur's time. Despite this importance, many people are unaware of some basic autoclave operating procedures that can improve the quality of sterilization as well as reduce the risk of personal injury.

- ◆ Never autoclave nitrocellulose tubes – they can explode!
  - ◆ Carefully prepare items for autoclaving. Loosely cover or cap containers to avoid over-pressurization.
  - ◆ Keep loads small – overloading hinders steam penetration.
  - ◆ Bags should be left partially open and should be contained within a tray.
  - ◆ If time allows let the load cool before removing it from the autoclave. Otherwise, open the door about ½ inch and vent for 5-10 minutes before emptying autoclave.
  - ◆ Wear shoes/sneakers, pants, lab coat, face shield, and long sleeved insulated gloves when operating an autoclave. A heavy, rubberized insulated apron is further recommended for those who autoclave frequently.
  - ◆ Periodically verify autoclave effectiveness with biological and chemical indicators that are available from the Biosafety Office.
  - ◆ Report any problems or unusual occurrences to you supervisor, Building Operations Coordinator, or the Office of Environmental Health and Safety (785-3550).
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