

Expiration Dates

[Using Products Beyond the Manufacturer Expiration Date](#)
[Confusion about Expiration Date Format](#)

Using Products Beyond the Manufacturer Expiration Date (8/09)

NOTE: This information supersedes all information regarding manufacturer expiration dates posted on the DECS Web site or disseminated via personal communications with the DECS staff.

Question: Recently, room inspections in our clinic have repeatedly turned up expired materials (e.g., visible light-cured composite, impression materials, sutures). What is your opinion regarding the acceptability of using these expired materials?

Answer: The Air Force recommends that manufacturer expiration dates be observed for several reasons. For example, visible light-cured composites contain many components, all of which are crucial for the material's physical properties. Dental manufacturers determine a material's expiration date consistent within known performance specifications and will not guarantee its performance past that date. Single-use disposable items such as sutures, safety scalpels, and irrigating syringes also have a shelf-life. These items are packaged and sterilized by the manufacturer and usually the package is labeled with something similar to "sterility is guaranteed unless package is damaged" indicating an indefinite shelf life. Just as with patient-care instruments that we sterilize in the dental clinic (event-related shelf life/sterility), these items are considered sterile until the integrity of the package is compromised. However, in some instances there will be an expiration date on the package. If there is an expiration date, the sterility cannot be guaranteed beyond the date on the package and the item must not be used if the date has passed. As a reminder, single-use disposable items cannot be reprocessed (i.e., cleaned and sterilized) for use in USAF medical or dental treatment facilities. Finally, there could be medico-legal consequences if products are used for patient care beyond their expiration date. If you have a question about the shelf-life of a product because an expiration date isn't clearly stated on the package or in the package insert/directions, you should contact the manufacturer for additional information.



[Return to Top](#)

Confusion about Expiration Date Format (Originally published in Sept 2000) **UPDATED** (8/09)

Question: I know that it is important to pay attention to the expiration date on dental products. Recently, though, I ran into a confusing date on a product. The date I saw on it was "09-10." I don't know if that means the product expires in September 2010 or October 2009. Is there a standard format used when dating products?

Answer: Actually, there is a standard format that has been proposed by the [International Organization for Standardization](#) (ISO). The ISO develops and adopts standards for use around the world in an attempt to prevent confusion when different standards are used by different countries or by different groups within a country. Your situation is exactly what the ISO is trying to prevent. The ISO Standard 8601 for dates and times deals with this issue and clearly describes the recommended format.

In a nutshell, the international standard date notation is YYYY-MM-DD. Therefore a date such as October 23, 2009 should be written as "2009-10-23". If just a month and year are involved, as in the case you mentioned, it should appear as YYYY-MM. So, if a product has an expiration date of October 2009, it should be written as 2009-10. If a manufacturer uses only a two-digit designation for the year and doesn't follow the standard format there is the potential for confusion. If so, a date such as the one you mentioned (09-10) could be mistaken for September 2010, when it really stands for October 2009. Most manufacturers prevent this from being a problem by using the appropriate standard notation and listing the complete four-digit year (see example shown at right). In the future then, you will know if the proper designation is used if you see a date such as 2010-06. If you receive products from a company that lists only two digits for the year, you may want to let its customer service department know of the confusion this can cause. Hopefully, if they receive enough complaints, they will be persuaded to comply with the ISO standard.



[Return to Top](#)