

Sterility Assurance & Contamination Control Strategy

Building a CCS that holds up under EU GMP Annex 1 (2022) and US FDA cGMP and that your sterility policy can actually stand behind.

Dr. Sanjay Kumar Jain

Chief Quality Officer

Amneal Pharmaceuticals LLC

60 minutes

52 minutes content • 8 minutes discussion

**Monitoring or testing alone does not give
assurance of sterility.**

Technical Report No. 90
**Contamination Control Strategy Development in
Pharmaceutical Manufacturing**

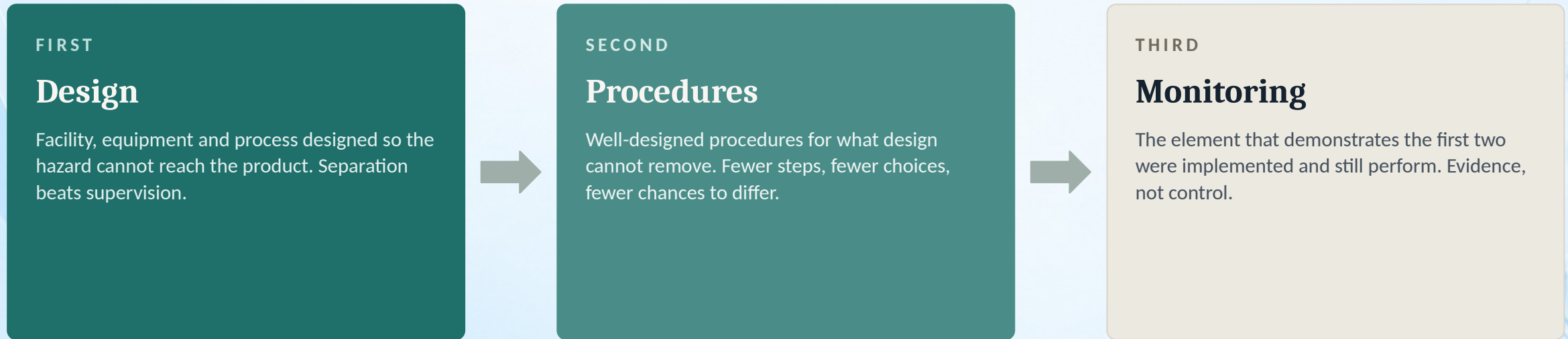


Brussels, 22.8.2022
C(2022) 5938 final

GUIDELINES

The Rules Governing Medicinal Products in the European Union
Volume 4 EU Guidelines for Good Manufacturing Practice for Medicinal Products for
Human and Veterinary Use

Where assurance actually comes from



EU GMP Annex 1 (2022), paragraph 2.2

Assurance comes from design first, then procedures, and only then from the monitoring that demonstrates the first two are working.

From SOPs to strategy: the mindset shift

For decades we managed contamination reactively — CAPAs after deviations, procedural tightening after audits, retraining after failures. That satisfies a regulator on paper. It does not prevent recurrence.

THE REACTIVE MODEL

- Deviation, then CAPA
- Static EM schedules set years ago
- Siloed ownership — contamination is QA's problem
- Validation as an event
- Compliance measured by document completeness



THE STRATEGIC MODEL

- Risk mapped before the deviation
- Monitoring designed to answer a question
- Cross-functional ownership with named accountability
- Lifecycle contamination control
- Effectiveness measured by outcomes

True sterility assurance isn't about what you find — it's about what you prevent.

The executive framework: Design, Conduct, Control

DESIGN

What it covers

Facility layout, HVAC, material flow, isolators and RABS.

What leadership must do

Insist on contamination-risk mapping during design. Approve airflow visualisation and pressure integrity early in CapEx planning — not after qualification.

CONDUCT

What it covers

Gowning, operator behaviour, cleaning practice and every human intervention.

What leadership must do

Embed aseptic discipline into performance KPIs. Make training cyclic and continuous, not an annual event.

CONTROL

What it covers

Monitoring, trending, risk review and CAPA effectiveness.

What leadership must do

Chair a quarterly CCS review board. Evaluate the data, name the trends, and drive action across departments.

The most successful companies treat the CCS the way they treat finance — reviewed routinely, owned collectively, continually optimised.

The regulatory frame

EU GMP Annex 1 (2022)

Binding through Directive 2001/83/EC. The only text that names a contamination control strategy and says what it must contain.

21 CFR 210 and 211

Binding US cGMP. Sterility assurance obligations sit in 211.42, 211.46, 211.113 and 211.192 rather than in one place.

FDA Aseptic Processing Guidance

September 2004, still current. Non-binding, but it is the yardstick an investigator brings into the room.

PIC/S PE 009

Annex 1 was a joint EU, PIC/S and WHO revision, so the PIC/S text is aligned. This is what reaches most non-EU inspectorates.

ICH Q9(R1) and Q10

The risk management and quality system machinery the CCS is built on. Q9(R1) is the current revision.

Your corporate policy

Sits above all of them. It decides what risk the company will accept, and who is allowed to accept it.

The global lens: what regulators now look for

Annex 1 asks the CCS to document a holistic, facility-wide approach to controlling contamination risk. FDA's expectations align closely: cross-functional ownership, continual verification, and a documented rationale behind every control.

Comprehensive mapping

Every contamination risk identified and located, not just the ones that have already caused a deviation.

A documented CCS with lifecycle thinking

A strategy that anticipates change, not a snapshot of the facility on its approval date.

Continuous verification of effectiveness

Evidence that the controls still work, generated routinely rather than assembled for the inspection.

Evidence of management review

A conclusion drawn by senior management, traceable to data, and recorded.

Demonstrated cultural ownership

Operators who can explain why a control exists, not just that it does.

The question is no longer whether you have a CCS document. It is how that document lives in your daily operations.

What the sterility policy must fix

Six things the group decides once, so that sites do not each invent their own answer and then have to defend the difference.

Risk appetite

What level of residual contamination risk the company will carry, stated in terms that can be tested against data.

Decision rights

Who may accept a residual risk, who may release at risk, and who may not. Named roles, not committees.

Minimum standards

Where the company holds itself above the regulatory floor, and why. Barrier technology usually sits here.

Escalation

What must reach corporate quality and how fast: Grade A recovery, failed APS, sterility test positive, container closure failure.

Technology roadmap

The stated intention on separation, automation and rapid methods, with dates. Inspectors read the absence of one as drift.

Data governance

How monitoring data is collected, reviewed, trended and retained, and who is accountable for acting on a trend.

Sterility assurance objectives you can measure

Metric	What a controlled state looks like
Grade A viable recovery rate	Recoveries per thousand samples, trending down; every single recovery investigated to species
Grade B personnel excursion rate	Glove print and gown excursions per thousand samples, by individual and by shift
Interventions per batch	Counted from batch records, split inherent and corrective; corrective interventions trending down
APS outcome	Zero contaminated units, with intervention coverage demonstrably matching production
Disinfection efficacy	Validated log reduction per surface type, verified by post-disinfection recovery, not ATP alone
Investigation quality	Time to close, and the proportion of investigations with a repeat root cause
Sterility assurance level	10 ⁻⁶ or better for every validated sterilisation process

Map the contamination pathways first

Before any scoring, draw the routes. Every source, every way it can reach the exposed product, and the control standing in each path.

SOURCES

Personnel

Materials and components

Equipment and surfaces

Utilities — water, gas, steam

Air and environment

ROUTES INTO THE CRITICAL ZONE

Airborne transfer

Surface and contact transfer

Transfer through airlocks and hatches

Direct intervention by an operator

WHAT IS AT RISK

Exposed product

Sterilised product, containers and closures in the Grade A critical zone.

Where the map pays off

Airflow mapping and smoke studies routinely expose risks nobody had scored — most often at material transfer points and at the Grade B to Grade C interface.

Every control in the CCS should sit on one of these arrows. A pathway with no control against it is either an accepted risk with somebody's name on it, or a gap.

Scope of the facility and process risk assessment

Domain	What the assessment has to establish
Facility and airflow	Unidirectional flow maintained across the whole Grade A zone; no ingress from lower grades; airflow visualised at rest and in operation, including simulated interventions
Equipment	Materials of construction, cleanability, sterilisation route, maintenance access from outside the cleanroom wherever practicable
Personnel	Number present, movement paths, gowning, every point at which a person can reach into or over the critical zone
Materials and components	Incoming bioburden and endotoxin, storage, the transfer route into Grade A or B and what happens if it is interrupted
Utilities	Water, clean steam, process gases, vacuum — which of them contact product or product-contact surfaces
Process steps	Every point of exposure: open filling, aseptic connections, sampling, transfers, lyophiliser loading, capping

Rank each pathway for severity, likelihood and detectability — then concentrate on the fifth of the risks that produce most of the deviations.

How contamination risk assessments fail

Scores reverse-engineered from the conclusion. The existing design is the answer, and the scoring is built until it agrees.

Detectability credit for monitoring that cannot detect. A programme sampling a vanishing fraction of the air is given the same weight as an engineering control.

Assessed by people who have never gownned into Grade B. The intervention that actually happens at three in the morning never appears on the map.

Residual risk accepted by nobody in particular. Annex 1 requires the rationale for risk acceptance to be documented. A signature block is not a rationale.

Frozen at approval. The facility changed, the process changed, the flora changed — the assessment did not.

What a CCS is — and what it is not

It is

- Implemented across the facility, not per room or per line
- A definition of all critical control points
- An assessment of the effectiveness of every control — design, procedural, technical and organisational
- An account of how those controls interact
- Actively reviewed and updated, driving continual improvement
- Reviewed for effectiveness as part of periodic management review

It is not

- An index of SOPs that already existed
- A gap assessment against Annex 1
- A one-time deliverable with an approval date and no successor
- The environmental monitoring programme with a new cover page
- A document owned by one person in QA
- A replacement for the individual controls — it assesses them together

Annex 1 paragraph 2.3. Existing control systems that are working need not be replaced — but they must be referenced in the CCS, and the interactions between them must be understood.

The sixteen elements — Annex 1, paragraph 2.5

- i.** Design of plant and processes, including documentation
- ii.** Premises and equipment
- iii.** Personnel
- iv.** Utilities
- v.** Raw material controls, including in-process controls
- vi.** Product containers and closures
- vii.** Vendor approval, including sterilisation of components and single-use systems
- viii.** Management of outsourced activities and transfer of critical information
- ix.** Process risk management
- x.** Process validation
- xi.** Validation of sterilisation processes
- xii.** Preventative maintenance of equipment, utilities and premises
- xiii.** Cleaning and disinfection
- xiv.** Monitoring systems, including feasibility of alternative methods
- xv.** Prevention mechanisms — trending, investigation, root cause, CAPA
- xvi.** Continuous improvement based on all of the above

The list is explicitly not exhaustive. Treat it as the minimum table of contents, then add what your process needs.

Elements of Contamination Control Strategy

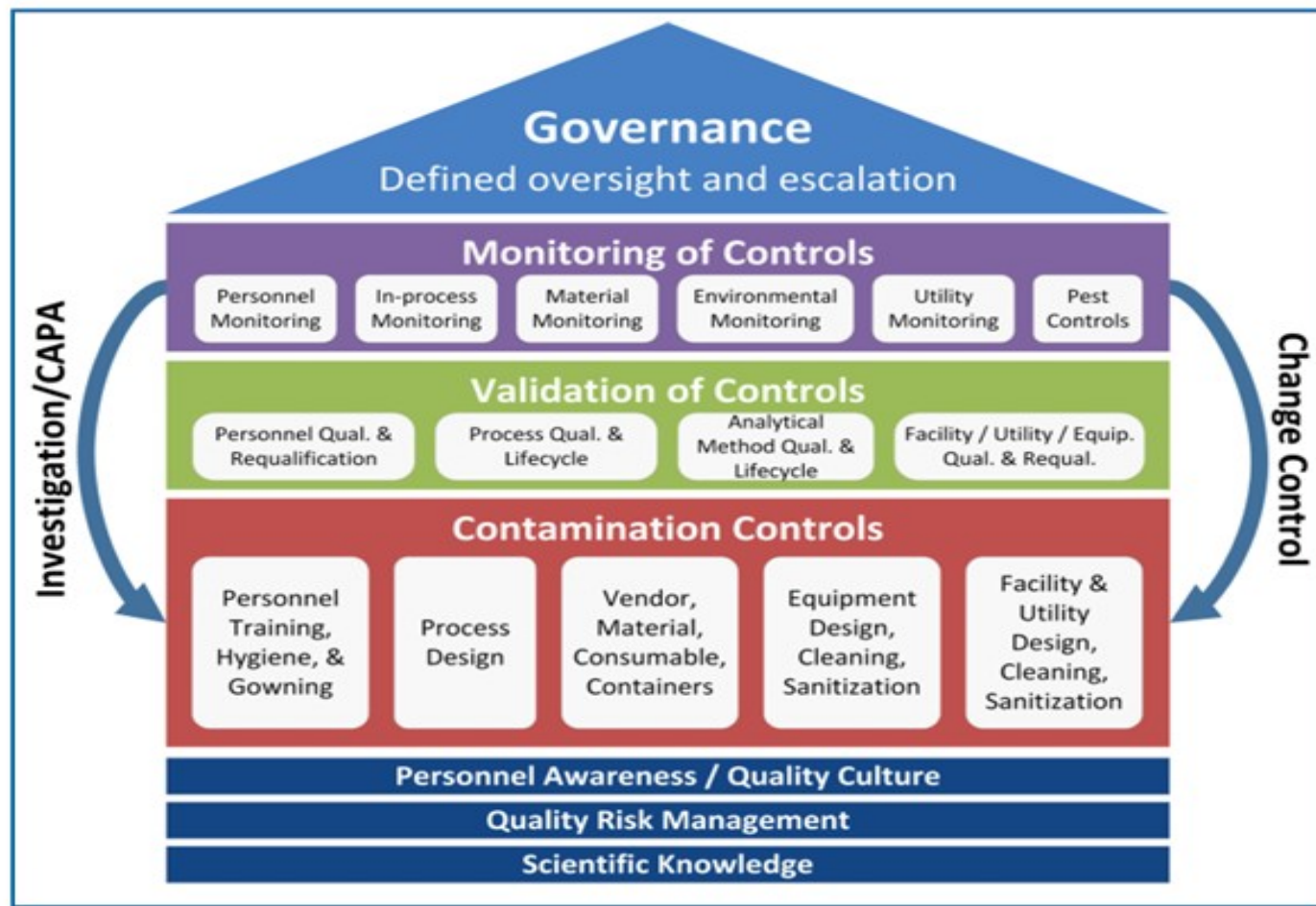


Figure 3.0-1 Elements of a Contamination Control Strategy (courtesy of Sanofi)

Structuring the CCS so it survives

TIER 1 **Sterility assurance policy.** Risk appetite, decision rights, minimum standards, escalation.

TIER 2 **Site contamination control strategy.** The integrating document: critical control points, combined effectiveness, residual risk, interactions.

TIER 3 **Sub-strategies.** Environmental monitoring, disinfection, personnel, barrier and aseptic processing, utilities, materials and components.

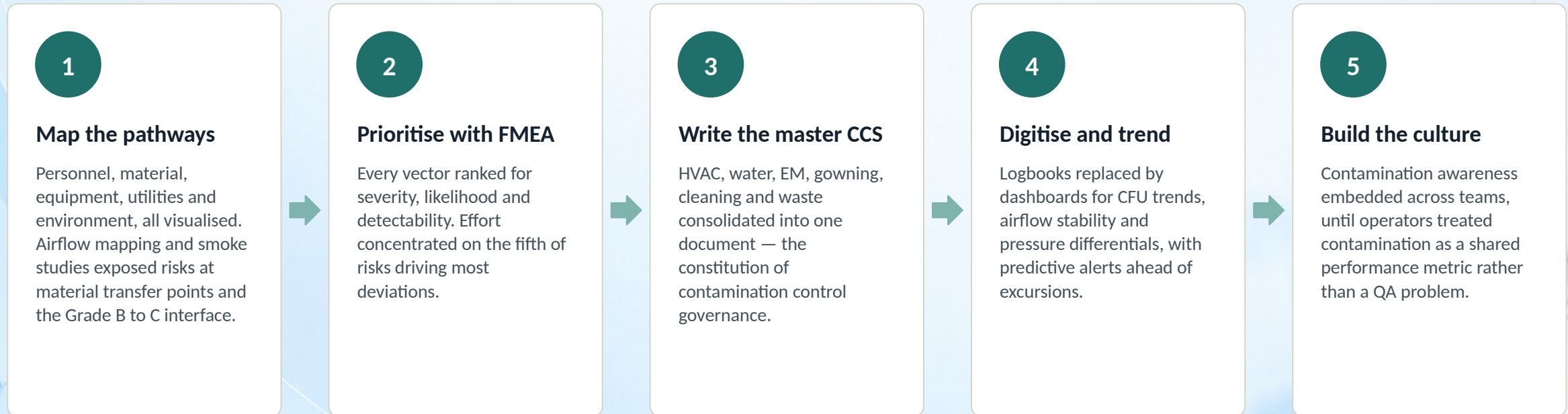
TIER 4 **Procedures, protocols and records.** Where the control actually happens.

Then build one traceability matrix: each of the sixteen elements, the control that addresses it, and the evidence that proves the control works. That matrix is what an inspector will ask you to open.

Proving the CCS works

CCS element	Effectiveness evidence
Facility and airflow design	Grade A recovery rate; airflow visualisation current and performed in operation with interventions
Personnel	Gowning qualification pass rate; personnel monitoring excursions per thousand samples, by individual
Cleaning and disinfection	Post-disinfection surface recovery; spore-former trend; flora shift over time
Aseptic process	APS outcome; intervention rate and mix against the authorised list
Utilities	Water and gas trend against alert levels; time from alert excursion to action
Prevention mechanisms	Proportion of investigations reaching a verified root cause; repeat root cause rate
The strategy overall	Excursion rate direction across grades; management review record showing the conclusion drawn

Five steps to a resilient CCS



Sequence matters: mapping before scoring, scoring before documenting, documenting before digitising — and culture last, because it needs something real to be built on.

Results after eighteen months

100%

reduction in environmental
monitoring excursions

Zero

major contamination deviations

Faster

regulatory approvals and audit
readiness

Higher

team morale and accountability

What produced the numbers

None of these came from buying an isolator. They came from mapping the pathways honestly, concentrating effort on the risks that actually drove deviations, and giving the data somewhere to go.

The reasonable challenge from the floor is whether a single site's numbers transfer. They do not. What transfers is the sequence — and the fact that the gains came before the capital spend, not after it.

MODULE 5 • ENVIRONMENTAL AND PERSONNEL MONITORING

Monitoring detects a loss of control. It does not create control.

So design the programme to answer a question — where would contamination reach the product, and would this sample find it, rather than to produce a defensible number of plates.

What Grade A monitoring actually requires

Non-viable

- Continuous, for both $\geq 0.5 \mu\text{m}$ and $\geq 5 \mu\text{m}$
- Sample flow rate at least 28 litres per minute
- Must capture interventions, transient events and system deterioration
- Alarms triggered at alert level, not only at action level

Viable

- Continuous air monitoring in Grade A
- For the full duration of critical processing, including aseptic equipment set-up
- Grade B to be considered on the same logic, risk-based
- Recoveries identified to species where possible

A correction worth making at your site

The one cubic metre minimum sample volume for Grade A was a 2008 requirement. It is not in the 2022 text. Paragraph 9.21 states the monitoring sample volume need not match the volume used for classification — it must simply be justified. Several sites still carry the old figure in their SOPs as though it were current.

MODULE 6 • PERSONNEL

The operator is the only contamination source that enters the critical zone by design.

Much of the rest of the CCS exists to compensate for that. Which is why Annex 1 asks you to minimise the number of people, minimise what they do, and prove that each one of them can do it.

Gowning qualification — and disqualification

Requirement	EU GMP Annex 1 (2022)	US FDA
Assessment	Visual and microbial; sites include gloved fingers, forearms, chest and hood or facemask	Microbiological surface sampling at several justified gown locations
Reassessment	At least annually	Annual normally sufficient where personnel involvement is minimised
Unsupervised Grade A or B access	Restricted to those who passed gowning assessment and took part in a successful APS	Only qualified and appropriately gowned personnel
Routine personnel monitoring	Glove prints and gown sites per Table 6; Grade A is no growth	Gloves sampled daily or in association with each lot
Disqualification	On adverse monitoring trend or implication in a failed APS; requalification before any further aseptic involvement	Procedures must cover retraining, requalification or reassignment

Requalification for Grade B entry or Grade A intervention should include participation in a successful APS. A disqualification system that exists on paper but has never been triggered invites the obvious question.

Interventions: the control most sites under-manage

An authorised list exists. Inherent and corrective interventions, each one designed, risk-assessed for airflow and surface impact, and evaluated through APS before it is permitted.

Engineering first. Solutions that remove the need for a person to reach in are preferred to procedures that describe how to reach in safely.

Non-qualified interventions are exceptional. Only with quality unit authorisation, a risk assessment, a full investigation under the quality system, and consideration at batch disposition.

Everything is recorded. Each intervention and line stoppage in the batch record, with time, duration and the operators involved.

Someone is watching. Aseptic operations observed regularly by people with specific aseptic processing expertise, and poor practice addressed when it is seen.

The inspection question is always the same: show me the authorised list, then show me a batch record that proves you followed it.

Cleaning and disinfection

Clean before you disinfect

Residues inhibit the agent. The cleaning step is not a courtesy before disinfection — it is what makes disinfection possible.

More than one mode of action

Annex 1 asks for more than one type of disinfecting agent so that combined use is effective against bacteria and fungi, plus periodic sporicidal use.

Sterile in Grade A and B

Disinfectants and detergents used in Grade A and B must be sterile before use. In Grade C and D, sterile where the CCS determines it.

Dilutions are controlled

Prepared in cleaned, where applicable sterilised containers, stored only for the defined period, and monitored for microbial contamination.

Remove the residues

The cleaning programme must effectively remove disinfectant residues, which otherwise accumulate and change surface behaviour.

Monitor for resistance

Regular monitoring to assess programme effectiveness and to detect shifts in flora — including organisms resistant to the regime currently in use.

What the disinfection validation must show

On the surfaces you actually have. Each material of construction, or a justified representative material — not a generic coupon set from the supplier's file.

In the manner you actually use it. The real contact time, the real application method, the real soil load. Annex 1 says in the specific manner in which they are used.

Against your own isolates. Compendial strains plus organisms recovered from your own cleanrooms, including any that have been persistent.

Supporting the in-use expiry. The study has to justify how long a prepared solution may be kept, because that is a number operators rely on daily.

Rotation is not the requirement. Annex 1 asks for more than one mode of action and periodic sporicidal use. Alternating two agents on a calendar, with no evidence either was needed, is habit rather than control.

Material, equipment and personnel flow

Annex 1 calls transfer into and out of cleanrooms and critical zones one of the greatest potential sources of contamination. It is also the control most often designed around an existing building.

In, unidirectionally

Into Grade A or B through double-ended sterilisers sealed into the wall where possible; otherwise a validated process achieving the same objective.

Out, separately

Removal of materials, waste and samples via a separate unidirectional route; where impossible, time-based separation with controls against contaminating incoming items.

Airlocks that interlock

Interlocking systems for airlocks serving Grade A and B; visual or audible warning as a minimum for C and D. Entry and exit doors never open together.

An approved list

Only items on an approved list, assessed during transfer validation, go into Grade A or B. Exceptions are pre-approved with a QA-approved disinfection and monitoring programme.

The last stage matches

At rest, the final stage of the airlock is the same grade — viable and total particle — as the cleanroom it opens into.

People and materials apart

Separate airlocks for personnel and materials wherever possible; separate change rooms for entering and leaving Grade B is desirable, and required where the CCS shows high risk.

Designing an APS that actually challenges the process

The longest permitted run. Including the factors that come with it — operator fatigue, shift change, breaks and gown changes.

Every inherent intervention, and a representative set of corrective ones. Common interventions routinely; rare ones periodically. The simulation should mirror the authorised list.

Manual operations run at least as long as the real process. Where filling or closing is manual, or manipulations are extensive, duration is the challenge.

Lyophilisation simulated properly. Unsealed containers exposed to partial evacuation; vials not frozen; the medium kept aerobic so growth is not inhibited.

Run size that means something. 5 000 to 10 000 units is a generally acceptable starting point; below 5 000 production units, at least the maximum batch size made on the line.

Not a cleaner version of production. A simulation run under exceptional air quality or with unusual care makes the process look better than it is — and a media fill must never be used to justify a practice that carries unnecessary risk.

One contaminated unit: what happens next

Incubation complete — one or more contaminated units found

EU GMP Annex 1 (2022)

Failed APS — regardless of run size

Investigate to the most probable root cause

Determine and implement corrective action

Three consecutive successful APS runs

Review every batch since the last successful APS

US FDA (2004)

Outcome depends on the run size

Under 5 000 units: one unit means revalidation after investigation

5 000 to 10 000: one means investigate and consider a repeat; two means revalidation

Over 10 000: one means investigate; two means revalidation

Assess impact on batches made since the last media fill

APS acceptance: reading the divergence

EU GMP Annex 1 (2022)

- The target is zero growth
- Any contaminated unit means a failed APS, whatever the run size
- Investigation to the most probable root cause, then corrective action
- A minimum of three consecutive successful APS runs to show a return to a state of control
- Review of all batches made since the last successful APS, including those not yet released

US FDA (2004)

- Acceptance is tiered by run size
- Any contaminated unit is objectionable and investigated; organisms identified to species
- Recurring contamination signals an adverse trend regardless of the tier
- Revalidation follows two contaminated units in the larger run sizes
- Impact assessed on commercial batches since the last media fill

Annex 1 in 2008 was aligned with the FDA tiers; the 2022 revision deliberately broke that alignment. But note FDA's own position: a firm remains fully liable for any non-sterile unit shipped, and recurring contamination is an adverse trend whatever the acceptance table says. The philosophical gap is smaller than the tables suggest — the operational gap is large.

Investigating contamination events

Before release, not after. Sterility test failures, EM excursions and procedural deviations are investigated before batch certification. That is paragraph 3.2, and it is not negotiable.

Root cause at the level that identifies risk to product. Annex 1 asks that root cause analysis be performed so the risk to product is correctly identified and understood — not so a plausible cause is recorded.

Scope stated, and exclusions justified. Which other processes and batches are potentially affected — and the reason for including or excluding any of them recorded.

Identity is evidence. Species-level identification, mapped against site flora, disinfectant susceptibility and the personnel and material routes that could deliver that organism to that point.

A repeat root cause is a CCS failure. Not an investigation failure. If the same cause returns, the strategy did not change anything — and that belongs in management review, not in another CAPA.

Keeping the CCS alive

Change control, both ends

Paragraph 2.6 requires the impact on the CCS to be assessed before and after implementation. The post-implementation half is almost always missing.

Named update triggers

Facility or equipment change, new product or process, adverse trend, failed APS, sterility positive, regulatory change, inspection finding. Write the list into the CCS itself.

Cross-functional ownership

Quality, manufacturing, engineering, microbiology and validation reviewing the same data together. A CCS owned by one function decays into that function's view.

Senior management oversight

Annex 1 asks senior management to oversee the state of control throughout the facility and product lifecycle, with risk outcomes reviewed regularly and on significant emerging problems.

A CCS that has not changed in two years is either describing a facility that has not changed in two years, or it is not being maintained. An inspector will work out which.

What inspectors go after

Grade A recoveries

Every one of them, and what the investigation concluded. No growth means any recovery has a file behind it.

Airflow visualisation

Current, in operation, showing interventions. Videos must be retained, and they must match the line as it is today.

Disinfection evidence

Validation on your surfaces, your isolates, your contact times — and the residue removal step.

Accepted residual risk

What the site decided to live with, the rationale, and the person who signed it.

Interventions against records

The authorised list, then a completed batch record, then whether the two agree.

APS versus reality

Whether the simulation covers what the line actually does, including the shift that is never simulated.

Personnel trends by name

Whether anyone shows an adverse trend, and what happened when they did.

Contract sterilisation

Outsourced activities and the transfer of critical information — a named CCS element and a frequent blind spot.

Defending the CCS in the room

Lead with the critical control points. Not the document structure, not the approval history. Show where contamination could reach product and what stops it.

Have the traceability open. Element, control, evidence of effectiveness. If you can answer any of the sixteen in under a minute, the tone of the inspection changes.

Name your three highest residual risks. Unprompted, with what you are doing about each and by when. A site that cannot name them is telling you it has not looked.

Show the trends you actually use. The working review pack, not a report assembled for the inspection. The difference is visible immediately.

Where a control failed, say so. Then show what changed. A well-investigated failure with a verified corrective action is stronger evidence of control than a clean record nobody believes.

The operators are the strategy. Any one of them should be able to explain why a gowning step or an intervention rule exists. That is the CCS working, not the document.

The payoff: from reactive to resilient

Where it shows up	What changes when the CCS actually works
Sterility assurance	A measurable reduction in batch failures and contamination deviations
Audit readiness	Faster regulatory approvals and fewer Form 483 observations
Operational efficiency	Less downtime, less rework, less material waste
Financial performance	Spend shifts from reactive CAPA to proactive prevention — the cheaper side of the ledger
Brand and trust	Greater confidence from regulators and from the market

The question for leadership

Not “do we have a CCS?” but “does our CCS work — and does it evolve?”

Ten things to take back

- 1 Design first, procedures second, monitoring third. Annex 1 puts that order in writing.
- 2 Map the pathways before you score them. The risks that matter are rarely the ones already on the register.
- 3 The CCS assesses combined effectiveness. It is not an index of documents.
- 4 Classification and monitoring are different tables. Table 5 sets a 5 µm limit where Table 1 does not.
- 5 Grade A is no growth. Any recovery is an investigation, not a data point.
- 6 Grade A viable and non-viable monitoring is continuous and covers aseptic set-up.
- 7 One contaminated unit fails the APS in the EU, and three consecutive successful runs recover it.
- 8 Interventions are an authorised list, evidenced in batch records — the commonest gap between paper and practice.
- 9 Residual risk must be named, accepted and owned by somebody on the record.
- 10 CCS effectiveness belongs in management review, with a written conclusion traceable to data.

Your cleanroom may be validated and your SOPs immaculate. The question is whether your strategy is alive. Contamination control is not a document — it is a discipline.

Questions ?

Primary sources

EudraLex Volume 4, Annex 1 — Manufacture of Sterile Medicinal Products (25 August 2022)

FDA Guidance for Industry — Sterile Drug Products Produced by Aseptic Processing, cGMP (September 2004)

21 CFR Parts 210 and 211

Supporting

ICH Q9(R1) Quality Risk Management — EU effective 26 July 2023

ICH Q10 Pharmaceutical Quality System

PIC/S PE 009, Annex 1; ISO 14644 series; WHO GMP for sterile products