OSCE checklist for cold application

An OSCE checklist for cold application covers checking the order and whether cold is safe for this patient, wrapping the cold pack, applying it for a limited time, watching the skin and sensation, and recording the result.

OSCE checklist for cold application: steps to practise

1. Clean your hands, introduce yourself, confirm the patient's name and date of birth (and wristband if an inpatient), explain why cold is being used and gain consent.
2. Check the order or care plan, and look for reasons not to use cold, such as poor circulation, Raynaud's, reduced sensation, broken skin, or a patient who cannot tell you it hurts. If any apply, do not start and ask the nurse in charge.
3. Collect the ice pack or cold compress, a cover or cloth, a towel and a tray.
4. Wrap the cold pack in a cover or cloth. Never place ice or a frozen pack directly on the skin.
5. Explain what the patient will feel and ask them to tell you at once if it hurts, burns or goes numb.
6. Position the patient comfortably, keep them warm and covered, and expose only the area to be treated. Check the skin first.
7. Apply the pack for the time in the order or your local policy only.
8. Check the skin and sensation at regular intervals for paleness, blue or mottled colour, numbness, pain or blistering, and remove the pack at once if any appear.
9. Remove the pack, dry the skin, check it again, leave the patient comfortable and clean your hands.
10. Record the site, the start and stop times, skin findings and the effect on pain or swelling. Report skin damage or loss of feeling to the nurse in charge.

What candidates commonly forget

- Placing ice directly on the skin
- Leaving the pack on longer than ordered
- Not asking about pain or numbness

- Using cold on a limb with poor circulation
- Not checking the skin before and after
- Not recording the time

Local policy comes first

This is our own practice checklist. Your college, hospital or country may do some steps differently. Where local policy and this list disagree, follow local policy.

Practise the hands-on steps with a classmate or in a skills lab, because an AI patient cannot watch your technique. You can practise the talking part with an AI patient, and try one station free with no sign-up. Next, try A child after a playground fall. Back to the nursing foundation OSCE page: nursing foundation OSCE, or see the full OSCE checklist list.

Common questions

What is the OSCE checklist for cold application?

Confirm identity and consent, check the order and reasons not to use cold, wrap the pack, apply for the time ordered, check the skin and feeling, remove, check again and record.

Why not put ice directly on the skin?

It can cause a cold burn and tissue damage. Always use a barrier and check the skin often.

How long should cold be applied?

Use the time in the order or your local policy and remove it sooner if the skin changes or the patient reports pain or numbness.

When is cold used?

Common uses are to reduce swelling and pain after an injury. Follow the order and your local policy.

Sources

- NMC: standards of proficiency for registered nurses
- NMC: The Code

Checked 2026-11-13. Fees and rules change, so confirm them with the regulator before you book.