



## Community Infection Prevention and Control Guidance for Health and Social Care

# Laundry

# LAUNDRY

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## LAUNDRY

### 1. Introduction

An adequate laundry service must be available in order to provide care that is both safe for staff and service users. Linen used in health and social care environments can become soiled with blood, faeces and other body fluids containing micro-organisms. Therefore, when handling used, soiled, fouled and infected linen, it is essential that care is taken to prevent the spread of infection.

All linen used in a health and social care setting should be washed appropriately ensuring the correct temperature is achieved to destroy micro-organisms. Failure to achieve this has resulted in outbreaks of infection notably with spore-forming bacteria such as *Bacillus cereus*. Micro-organisms that remain after washing are usually destroyed by tumble drying and ironing.

Linen should be fit for purpose, look clean and should not be damaged or discoloured.

The use of linen in General Practices is not recommended, best practice is to use disposable paper products. Curtains and fabric screens should be laundered by a professional laundry service on a planned schedule, e.g., 6 monthly or laundered immediately if visibly soiled.

### 2. Linen classifications

It is the responsibility of the person handling linen to ensure that it is segregated appropriately.

#### STANDARD PROCESS

##### Used, soiled and fouled linen

This definition applies to all used linen and linen which may be contaminated by body fluids or blood. It does **not** apply to:

- linen from infectious service users
- those suspected of being infectious
- linen from service users with diarrhoea
- linen contaminated with blood or body fluids from service users with blood-borne viruses
- linen from a service user with a known or suspected infection, e.g., varicella zoster (shingles).

Used, soiled and fouled linen should be placed in a white bag.

Soiled and fouled items should first be placed into a water soluble (alginate) bag sealed/tied and placed inside a white impermeable (plastic) bag or white fabric bag (it is best practice to use impermeable bags rather than fabric). Heavily soiled items should have, where possible, any solids removed before being placed into the water soluble bag.

### ENHANCED PROCESS

#### Infected linen

This definition applies to:

- linen from infectious service users
- those suspected of being infectious
- linen from service users with diarrhoea
- linen contaminated with blood or body fluids from service users with blood-borne viruses
- linen from a service user with a known or suspected infection, e.g., varicella zoster (shingles).

Items of infected linen should be placed in a red water soluble (alginate) bag, sealed/tied and placed inside a white impermeable (plastic) bag which is labelled as 'Infectious linen'. It is best practice to use impermeable bags, if a fabric bag is used it should be labelled stating 'Infectious linen'.

### 3. Handling of linen (used, soiled, fouled and infected)

All dirty linen should be handled with care and attention paid to the potential spread of infection. Service users and staff must not be put at risk during the handling, disposal and transportation of dirty linen.

- Linen should be removed from a service user's bed with care and placed in the appropriate bag, not placed on the floor. Care should be taken to prevent unnecessary shaking of linen as this will increase the number of bacteria in the air. The exposure of susceptible wounds should be avoided within 15-30 minutes of bed making.
- When handling used, soiled, fouled or infected linen, a disposable apron and gloves should be worn.
- After handling used, soiled, fouled or infected linen and removing gloves, hands must be washed thoroughly.
- Linen must be segregated correctly (see section 2 above) and placed in the correct bag before transport to the laundry area.
- Laundry bags should be sealed/tied securely and be no more than 2/3 full before transportation to the laundry.

- A laundry skip should be used for the segregation of linen and transportation to the laundry area.
- If fabric laundry bags are used rather than non-permeable (plastic) bags, they should be laundered with the contents of the bag. If plastic bags are used, they should be disposed of as offensive waste if no known or suspected infection, or infected waste if a known or suspected infection.
- Duvets should be washed at least every three months and between use on different service users. Duvets with a PVC cover should be cleaned regularly with detergent and warm water whenever visibly soiled and between service users in the same way as mattresses.
- Duvets covered with PVC should be cleaned regularly.
- Staff should ensure cuts and grazes are covered with a waterproof plaster when handling all linen.

#### 4. Laundering service user's own clothing

- To prevent contamination of hands, the sink and surrounding environment, service user's clothes that are soiled, fouled or infected should not be sluiced by hand, a washing machine sluice cycle should be used.
- Service user's own clothes should be laundered on the highest temperature possible for the item or as recommended by the manufacturer.

#### 5. Health and social care worker's uniforms and workwear

- Always use personal protective equipment to prevent contamination of uniforms.
- Uniforms and workwear should be laundered separately from other clothing on a hot wash cycle at the highest temperature that the fabric will tolerate.
- Garments should be dried thoroughly. Tumble drying or ironing will further reduce the small number of microbes present after washing.
- Use a clean plastic bag to transport laundered uniforms to work.

#### 6. Clean linen

- Clean linen and clothing should not be stored in the laundry room.
- Clean linen should be stored in a clean designated room/cupboard not used for other activities. The room/cupboard should be equipped with

shelving that can be easily cleaned and allow free movement of air around the stored linen.

- Linen should be stored above floor level, away from direct sunlight and water in a dry cool environment.
- The linen room/cupboard should have doors that are kept closed to prevent contamination of the linen.
- Clean linen must be monitored to ensure it is in a good state of repair.

## 7. Frequency of linen change

Linen or clothing should be laundered whenever visibly soiled, or at least weekly.

Linen, e.g., hoist slings, should be laundered between use on different service users.

## 8. Laundry temperatures – thermal disinfection

Washing processes should have a disinfection cycle in which the temperature in the load is maintained at either:

- 65°C for not less than 10 minutes, or
- 71°C for not less than 3 minutes.

With both options, 'mixing time' must be added to ensure heat penetration and effective disinfection.

For machines of conventional domestic design and a low degree of loading, e.g., below 0.056kg/litre, 4 minutes should be added to these times to allow for mixing time. A sluice cycle must be available on machines used in smaller provider units for dealing with foul/infected linen.

## 9. Requirements for laundry facilities

A designated separate room should be used for laundering of linen and the room should not be used for any other purpose. Industrial washing machines and tumble dryers rather than household ones should be used in health and social care premises, to ensure correct thermal disinfection of linen and provide evidence of temperature compliance.

- The room should have a dirty to clean work flow system, so that clean and soiled/fouled linen are physically separated throughout the process.

- Washing machines should be of an industrial type and have a sluice cycle for fouled linen and hot wash cycles (see Section 8 for correct temperature requirement). They should be professionally installed and maintained.
- An industrial dryer should be used that is regularly maintained to dry all clothing and linen.
- Appropriate personal protective equipment and eye protection should be available for staff.
- The room should have a hand wash basin with elbow operated mixer taps, no plug or overflow, wall mounted liquid soap and paper towels.
- Foot operated lidded waste bins, colour coded for domestic, offensive or infectious waste, should be available for the disposal of waste including impermeable waste bags.
- Laundry staff should not open water soluble bags, the bag should be placed directly in the washing machine.
- Heavily soiled items should have a pre-wash/sluice cycle selected.

Under no circumstances should a manual sluice facility or sluicing sink be used or situated in the laundry room.

## 10. Additional IPC resources

The North Yorkshire and York Community Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) team have produced a wide range of innovative educational and other IPC resources. These resources are designed to assist your organisation in achieving compliance with the Health and Social Care Act 2008 and CQC requirements. Further information on these high quality evidence-based resources is available at [www.infectionpreventioncontrol.co.uk](http://www.infectionpreventioncontrol.co.uk)

## 11. References

Department of Health (2013) *Choice Framework for local Policy and Procedures (CFPP) 01-04 Decontamination of linen for health and social care: Management and provision*

Department of Health (2013) *Choice Framework for local Policy and Procedures (CFPP) 01-04 Decontamination of linen for health and social care: Social care*

Department of Health (2010) *The Health and Social Act 2008. Code of Practice for the prevention and control of infections and related guidance*

Health Protection Agency (2013) *Prevention and control of infection in care homes – an information resource*