

Say No to Infection Linen Management Fact Sheet



Safe management of linen

The Health and Social Care Act 2008: Code of Practice on the prevention and control of infections and related guidance recommends that all adult social care providers must ensure the national guidelines on correct handling of linen are in place. Please follow the following guidance for best practice to provide care that is both safe for staff and residents alike. [Please click on the link for the Health and Social Care Act 2008: Code of practice on the prevention and control of infections.](#)

Linen in care homes can become soiled with blood, faeces and other body fluids containing micro-organisms such as bacteria, viruses, and fungi. Therefore, when handling used, soiled, fouled, and infected linen, it is essential that care is taken to prevent the spread of infection.

During the summer months especially, linen and laundry can grow bacteria faster because of higher temperatures. To prevent bacteria/viruses growing, the correct handling of linen can decrease the risk of infection from contaminated linen.

All linen used 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.

For all linen in ALL settings ensure you:

- Always keep clean and used linen separate
- Store clean linen above floor level, in a clean, cool, dry place
- Maintain stock rotation of linen, with the oldest linen used first.

A cleaning schedule should be in place for all areas used in the reprocessing of linen including the laundry room, clean linen storage, and used linen storage. This is to reduce the risk of cross-contamination and the build-up of dust.

Handling of linen (used, soiled, fouled, and infected)

Definition of linen

'Linen' means all reusable textile items requiring cleaning/disinfection via laundry processing including:

- Bed linen, blankets, counterpanes, duvets, duvet covers, pillowcases and sheets.
- Bibs
- Canvases
- Curtains
- Hoist slings
- Linen throws
- Resident clothing, including gowns, nightdresses and shirts, pyjama tops and bottoms.
- Slide sheets
- Staff clothing (coats, scrub suits, tabards, uniforms)
- Towels
- **Unused linen** - Any linen that has not been used since it was last laundered and that has not been near a resident or stored in a contaminated environment.
- **Used linen** - All linen used in the care environment that is not contaminated with either blood or body fluids.
- **Infected linen** - Any used linen that is soiled with blood or any other body fluid or any linen used by a patient with a known infection (whether soiled or not). Infected linen should be placed directly into a **RED** water-soluble alginate bag and secured, then placed into a **WHITE** bag.
- **Damaged linen** - Any linen that is torn, or heavily stained.

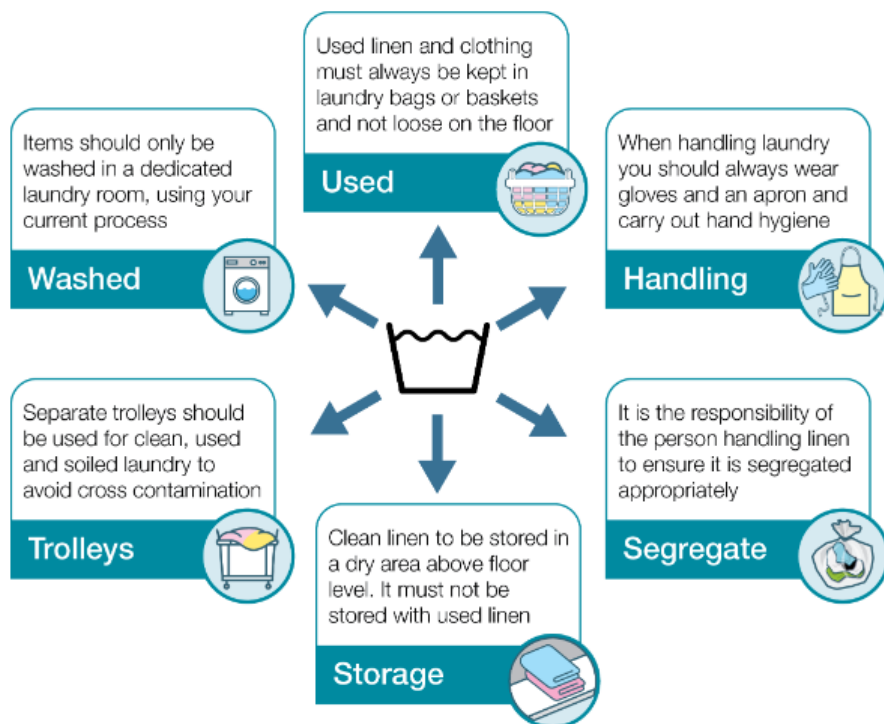
All dirty linen should be handled with care and attention paid to the potential spread of infection.

- PPE should be worn for handling dirty or contaminated clothing and linen and disposed off in the correct clinical waste stream.
- Linen should be removed from a resident's bed with care and placed directly into an appropriate linen container/basket/bag.
- Residents personal clothing should also be removed with care and placed in the bag and not placed upon the floor.
- Linen and other dirty laundry should not be held close to the chest to prevent contamination of the uniform.
- Segregate washing prior to transport to the laundry area. **DO NOT** empty bags of linen onto the floor as this presents an unnecessary risk of infection.

- Prevention of exposures to staff with body fluids- **DO NOT** manually sluice soiled laundry or linen that is soiled with blood or body fluids. Place in an alginate (water soluble bag) then an impermeable white bag and laundered as per guidance.

Linen and laundry

- the provision of clean linen is a fundamental requirement of care
- incorrect handling and storage of linen can pose an infection hazard
- care homes use a variety of different laundry systems and equipment, therefore it is important to understand the system being used and why



Linen cleaned off-site

If the used linen is cleaned off-site ensure you:

- Remove clean linen from plastic bags when you receive it as this will reduce the risk of spore growth.
- Store used linen for the shortest time possible before transportation.

Linen cleaned in-house

If the used linen is cleaned in-house ensure you:

- Make sure there is a clear separation of clean and dirty areas within the laundry room.

- Make sure there is clear separation of clean and dirty linen in the workflow.
- **Make sure there is no manual sluice facility or sluicing basin in the laundry area.**
- Store clean linen separate from the laundry area where used linen is laundered or stored.
- Store used linen for the shortest time possible before washing.

Uniforms and workwear

- Uniforms and workwear worn by staff when carrying out their duties should be clean and fit for purpose.
- Uniforms and workwear should specifically support good hand hygiene.
- Always use PPE to prevent contamination of uniforms when dealing with blood/body fluids.
- Soiled uniforms and workwear should be taken home in a plastic bag and 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 micro-organisms present after washing.
- Use a clean plastic bag to transport laundered uniforms to work.
- Footwear must be well maintained, visibly clean, non-slip and support and cover the entire foot to avoid contamination with blood or body fluids or potential injury from sharps.

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.

[Please click on the link for the Health Technical Memorandum \(HTM\) 01-04 which gives guidance for those who process linen used in health and adult social care settings.](#)

Industrial washing machines and tumble dryers rather than household ones should be used in care home premises, to ensure correct thermal disinfection of linen and provide evidence of temperature compliance.

- The room should have a dirty to clean workflow 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 chart below**). They should be professionally installed and be on a maintenance plan.
- An industrial regularly maintained dryer should be used 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 dispenser with disposable cartridges and paper towels in a dispenser.
- Separate lined and foot pedal operated lidded waste bins, colour coded for domestic, offensive, or infectious waste, should be available for the disposal of waste including waterproof waste bags.

Further Information

[Please click on the link for information on Linen Management](#)

Please see linen management table below for linen processing and temperatures.

Linen Management Table Guidance	Laundry Temperatures
<p>Standard Process (soiled and fouled linen and clothing)</p> <p>This definition applies to all used linen and linen which may be contaminated by body fluids or blood. It does not apply to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linen from residents with a known or suspected infection, e.g., varicella zoster (shingles). • Linen from residents with diarrhoea • Linen contaminated with blood or body fluids from residents with blood-borne viruses. 	<p>The items should be washed at the highest temperature recommended by the manufacturer.</p>
<p>Enhanced Process (Infected linen and clothing)</p> <p>This definition applies to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linen from a resident with a known or suspected infection, e.g., varicella zoster (shingles) • Linen from residents with diarrhoea. • Linen contaminated with blood or body fluids from residents with blood-borne viruses. <p>A red water soluble (alginate) bag for infected linen. The alginate bag should then be placed in a white waterproof or fabric/nylon/polyester bag. Additionally, the outer bag must be labelled as 'Infectious Linen'. If a fabric bag is used, it should be laundered after each use. If a lidded solid plastic laundry bin designated for transportation of the red water-soluble bag to the laundry is used, it should be cleaned and disinfected inside and out after removing the red bag.</p> <p>A sluice cycle should be available on machines used in smaller provider units for dealing with foul/infected linen.</p>	<p>Washing processes should have a disinfection cycle in which the temperature in the load is maintained at either:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 65 C for not less than 10 mins; or • 71 C for not less than 3 minutes <p>The items should be washed at the highest temperature recommended by the manufacturer.</p>
<p>Handling of linen (used, soiled, fouled, and infected)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff should ensure cuts and grazes are covered with a waterproof plaster when handling all linen. Disposable apron and gloves should be worn when handling used, soiled, fouled, or infected linen. • Linen should be removed from a resident'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 30 minutes of bed making. • Linen must be segregated correctly and placed in the correct bag before transport to the laundry area. • Laundry bags should be sealed/tied securely and be no more than ¾ full before transportation to the laundry. • Laundry staff should not open water-soluble bags, the bag should be placed directly in the washing machine. • After handling used, soiled, fouled or infection linen and removing gloves, hands must be washed thoroughly. • Where possible, a laundry skip should be used for the segregation of linen, and transportation to the laundry area. • If fabric laundry bags are used, they should be disposed of as offensive waste (if no known or suspected infection) or infectious waste if a known or suspected infection. • Duvets should be washed whenever visibly soiled, at least every 3 months and in between use on different residents. • Duvets with a PVC cover should be cleaned whenever visibly soiled, at least every 3 months and between residents. 	

