



Community Infection Prevention and Control Policy for Care Home settings

Safe management of linen, including uniforms and workwear

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SAFE MANAGEMENT OF LINEN, INCLUDING UNIFORMS AND WORKWEAR

1. Introduction

NHS England recommends that organisations adopt the *National infection prevention and control manual (NIPCM) for England*, complemented by care setting specific Policies. This Policy has been produced in accordance with this recommendation and incorporates the *NIPCM* version as referenced in this Policy with detailed care home specific guidance.

This Policy is one of the 'Standard infection control precautions' (SICPs).

Healthcare laundry must be managed and segregated in accordance with *Health Technical Memorandum 01-04: Decontamination of linen for health and social care*.

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

An adequate laundry service must be available in order to provide care that is safe for staff and residents. All linen used should be washed appropriately ensuring the correct temperature is achieved to destroy microorganisms. Failure to achieve this has resulted in outbreaks of infection, notably with spore forming bacteria such as *Bacillus cereus*. Microorganisms that remain after washing are usually destroyed by tumble drying and ironing.

Always use SICPs and, where required, 'Transmission based precautions' (TBPs), refer to the 'SICPs and TBPs Policy for Care Home Settings'.

When caring for residents in relation to any new or emerging infections, staff should refer to national infection prevention and control guidance.

2. Definition of linen

For the purposes of this document, '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

Note: Kylie (reusable) continence sheets should not be routinely used. Disposable bed pads/incontinence sheets must never be routinely used for management of incontinence as they are a risk to skin integrity. Based on individualised assessment, body worn continence pads, of the lowest necessary absorbency, should be used as an adjunct to regular toileting.

3. Linen classification

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

CLEAN LINEN

Linen washed and ready to be used.

USED (SOILED AND FOULED) LINEN AND CLOTHING

Standard process (colour code white or off white)

This definition applies to all used linen and clothing, irrespective of state, but on occasion may be 'lightly' contaminated with blood or body fluids. It does **not** apply to:

- Linen from residents with a confirmed or suspected infection, e.g. varicella zoster (shingles)
- Linen contaminated with diarrhoea
- Linen contaminated with blood or body fluids

Used linen items should be placed into a water-soluble bag, and additionally within a white cotton sack if required, or alternatively placed directly in a white waterproof bag. Any soiled items should have any solids removed prior to being placed into the bag. In larger premises, residents clothing may sometimes be bagged separately to bed linen.

INFECTIOUS LINEN AND CLOTHING

Enhanced process (colour code red)

This definition applies to:

- Linen from residents with a confirmed or suspected infection, e.g. varicella zoster (shingles)
- Linen contaminated with diarrhoea
- Linen contaminated with blood or body fluids

Infectious linen and clothing should be placed immediately into a red water-soluble (alginate) bag for infectious linen. Heavily soiled items should have any solids removed prior to being placed into the bag. 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.

4. Handling of used and infectious linen

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

- Staff should ensure cuts and grazes are covered with a waterproof dressing when handling all linen.
- Disposable apron should be worn when handling used, soiled or infected linen. Gloves should be worn if there is a risk of exposure to blood and/or body fluids or the resident has a confirmed or suspected infection. Facial protection should be worn if there is a risk of splashing to the face.
- Ensure laundry receptacle is available as close as possible to the point of use for immediate linen deposit.
- Items of used linen should be removed one by one from a resident's bed with care and placed in the appropriate bag, not placed on the floor.
- Infectious linen must not be sorted, but should be rolled together and sealed in a water-soluble bag (entirely water-soluble alginate bag or impermeable bag with soluble seams), which is then placed in an impermeable bag immediately upon removal from the bed and secured before leaving the resident's room.
- 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 (see Section 3 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.
- Laundry staff should not open water-soluble bags, the bag should be placed directly in the washing machine.
- After handling used or infectious 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 rather than waterproof bags, they should be laundered with the contents of the bag.
- If waterproof bags are used, they should be disposed of as offensive waste if no confirmed or suspected infection, or infectious waste if a confirmed or suspected infection.
- Duvets should be washed whenever visibly soiled, at least every three months and between use on different residents.
- Duvets with a PVC cover should be cleaned whenever visibly soiled, at least every three months and between residents, with general purpose neutral detergent and warm water or machine washed as per manufacturer's instructions.
- Remove and dispose of personal protective equipment (PPE), and clean hands after removal.
- Store all used/infectious linen in a designated, safe, lockable area.

5. Laundering resident's clothing

- Heavily soiled items should have a pre-wash/slurice cycle selected.
- Resident's clothes should be laundered on the highest temperature possible for the item or as recommended by the manufacturer.

6. 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 change in and out of uniform at work, or completely cover uniform when travelling to and from work.
- Wear a clean uniform at the start of each shift and have enough uniforms to facilitate this.
- Always use an apron to prevent contamination of the uniform.
- Change uniforms and workwear immediately if visibly soiled or contaminated.
- Soiled uniforms and workwear should be taken home in a plastic bag and laundered separately from other clothing on a hot wash cycle, ideally at 60°C or 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 microorganisms present after washing.
- Use a clean plastic bag to transport laundered uniforms to work.

7. Handling and storage of clean linen

- Hands must be clean when handling clean linen.
- Linen should be fit for purpose, look clean and should not be damaged or discoloured.
- Clean linen and clothing should not be stored in the laundry room.
- Clean linen should be removed from plastic bags before storage to prevent the growth of *Bacillus cereus*.
- Clean linen should be stored above floor level in a clean designated room/cupboard not used for other activities. The room/cupboard should be equipped with wipeable shelving that can be easily cleaned and allow free movement of air around the stored linen.
- No inappropriate items should be stored in the designated linen cupboard.
- If clean linen is not stored in a designated cupboard, then the trolley used for storage must be designated for this purpose and completely covered with an impervious covering and/or door that is able to withstand decontamination.
- Linen should be stored 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.
- Maintain stock rotation of linen, with the oldest linen used first.
- Clean linen should be physically separated from used/infectious linen when in storage and during transport.
- Gloves are not required for making beds with clean or used linen, but should be worn when there is a risk of exposure to blood and/or body fluids or the resident has a confirmed or suspected infection.

8. Frequency of laundering

- Linen, towels and resident's clothing should be laundered whenever visibly soiled, or at least weekly.
- Residents' face cloths, body scrunchies should be laundered after each use.
- Reusable hoist slings should be laundered regularly (frequency will depend on use and the resident) and whenever visibly soiled. Hoist slings should be single resident use, e.g. labelled for use by a named resident and should not be used by any other person.
- A schedule should be in place for routine changing/cleaning of curtains and blinds.

9. Laundry temperatures

Standard process

The items should be washed at the highest temperature recommended by the manufacturer.

Enhanced process

Washing processes should have a thermal 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

The items should be washed at the highest temperature recommended by the manufacturer.

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 0.056 kg/litre, 4 minutes should be added to these times to allow for mixing time. For a heaving degree of loading, e.g. above 0.056 kg/litre, it is necessary to add 8 minutes. A sluice cycle should be available on machines used in smaller provider units for dealing with foul/infectious linen.

10. 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 care home premises, to ensure correct thermal disinfection of linen and provide evidence of temperature compliance.

- The room ceiling, walls, floors, work surfaces, shelving and cupboards, should be intact, impervious to moisture and be able to be cleaned effectively.
- The room should have a dirty to clean work flow system, so that clean and used/infectious linen are physically separated throughout the process.
- Washing machines should be of an industrial type and have a sluice cycle and hot wash cycles (see Section 9 for correct temperature requirement). They should be professionally installed and maintained.
- An industrial regularly maintained dryer should be used to dry all clothing and linen.
- Appropriate PPE, including eye protection, should be available for staff.
- The room should have a handwash 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.

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

It is recommended that no inappropriate items, e.g. food, drink, staff belongings, are stored in the laundry room.

11. Evidence of good practice

It is recommended that, for assurance purposes, 'Safe management of linen, including uniforms and workwear' is audited. This can be achieved by completing the 'SICPs Assurance: Annual IPC Audit Tool for Care Homes' available to download at www.infectionpreventioncontrol.co.uk/resources/sicps-assurance-annual-ipc-audit-tool-for-care-homes/

Following completion of the audit, an 'Action plan' should be drawn up and implemented to demonstrate continuous improvement.

12. Infection Prevention and Control resources, education and training

See Appendix 1 for the 'Safe management of linen, uniforms and workwear: Quick reference guide'.

The Community Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) Team have produced a wide range of innovative educational and IPC resources designed to assist your Care Home in achieving compliance with the *Health and Social Care Act 2008: code of practice on the prevention and control of infections and related resources* and CQC registration requirements.

These resources are either free to download from the website or available at a minimal cost covering administration and printing:

- 30 IPC Policy documents for Care Home settings
- Preventing Infection Workbook: Guidance for Care Homes
- IPC CQC inspection preparation Pack for Care Homes
- IPC audit tools, posters, leaflets and factsheets
- IPC Bulletin for Care Homes

In addition, we hold IPC educational training events in North Yorkshire.

Further information on these high quality evidence-based resources is available at www.infectionpreventioncontrol.co.uk.

13. References

Department of Health and Social Care (March 2024) *Infection prevention and control: resource for adult social care*

Department of Health and Social Care (Updated December 2022) *Health and Social Care Act 2008: code of practice on the prevention and control of infections and related guidance*

Department of Health (Updated 2016) *Health Technical Memorandum 01-04: Decontamination of linen for health and social care*

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

NHS England (Updated 2025) *National infection prevention and control manual (NIPCM) for England*

NHS England and NHS Improvement (May 2020) *Uniforms and workwear: guidance for NHS employers*

UK Health Security Agency (August 2023) *Linen processing within adult social care: information sheet*

14. Appendices

Appendix 1: Safe management of linen, including uniforms and workwear



Safe management of linen, including uniforms and workwear: Quick reference guide



Risk management

Used linen can become soiled with blood and body fluids containing microorganisms, therefore, always handle with care.

Process	Indication	Instructions
Standard	Used (soiled and fouled) linen and clothing, e.g. no confirmed or suspected infection, occasionally lightly contaminated with blood or body fluids	White or off white Water-soluble bag with outer white cotton sack; or White waterproof bag Remove any solid contamination before placing in bag
Enhanced	Infectious linen and clothing, e.g. resident with confirmed or suspected infection, contaminated with blood or body fluids	Red Water-soluble bag with outer white bag labelled 'infectious linen'

Safe handling of used and infectious linen

- Cover cuts and abrasions.
- Use PPE.
- Avoid shaking linen and place directly in appropriate bag.
- Seal/tie securely when no more than 2/3 full.
- Store used and clean linen in separate designated areas.
- Place water-soluble bag directly into washing machine.
- Launder outer fabric bags.
- Dispose of waterproof bags in appropriate waste stream.
- Wash hands thoroughly after removing PPE.

Staff uniforms and workwear

- Wear a clean uniform at start of each shift, and change immediately if visibly soiled.
- Use PPE to prevent contamination.
- Take home used uniforms in a plastic bag and launder separately from other clothing at the highest temperature the fabric will tolerate.
- Use a clean plastic bag to transport laundered uniforms to work.

For further information, please refer to the full Policy which can be found at
www.infectionpreventioncontrol.co.uk/care-homes/policies/

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