

## Management of Linen

When we talk about linen we mean bed linen, pillows, towels, curtains and people's personal clothing. Linen has been shown to harbour large numbers of micro-organisms.

In this programme we will refer to various categories of linen:

- Clean Linen
- Used Linen – this is linen that has no visible soiling or has not been used by someone who is known or suspected of having an infection
- Infectious Linen – this is linen that has been used by an individual who has or is suspected of having an infection or where the linen is contaminated with body fluids such as vomit, urine or blood
- Heat Labile Linen – this is linen, perhaps clothing, where a label states a lower recommended washing temperature

Incorrect handling, laundering and storage of clean, used and infectious linen can pose as an infection hazard, therefore it is essential that all linen and laundry is adequately washed, dried and stored correctly in order to prevent and control the spread of infection.

Clean linen must be protected from dirt, dust and water contamination ideally stored in a designated area, for example a linen cupboard. It must not be stored in bathrooms, or on trolleys which go into dirty areas like the Sluice due to the risk of cross-contamination.

Any trolley used to transport the linen must be clean and free of dust and dirt. All staff handling the linen must have clean hands.

Used linen must be handled in a manner that protects individuals, staff and the environment from contamination and must be assessed for contaminants such as blood and body fluids.

First remove the used linen by rolling or folding the linen into a bundle, if the linen is deemed to be infectious, if there is faeces or vomit present then this should be picked up using a paper towel and disposed of.

Used or infectious linen should not be put on the floor or shaken or soaked or rinsed. It should be placed as a bundle in the correct laundry bag.

# Preventing Infection in Care

Infection Prevention and Control:  
Care Homes for Older People and  
Home Environment



There will be separate colour coded laundry bags for linen that is used and linen that has been assessed as infectious.

Your care home may use soluble laundry bags for heavily soiled linen and clothing which can be put directly into a washing machine.

You should remove your apron and gloves and wash your hands before handling the clean linen and completing the task.

Heat labile linen including many items of personal clothing are normally washed at low temperatures to avoid damaging the garment. This is sufficient in most circumstances to remove most micro-organisms, particularly in domestic style washers.

Family or friends may make a request to take clothes home to wash. This can be done normally but is not advisable during an outbreak in the care home or where clothes are very dirty or soiled due to the risk of contamination. A leaflet written by Health Protection Scotland aimed at family carers provides guidance on Washing Clothes at Home and is available on the accompanying CD.

## **To break the Chain of Infection:**

Remember:

- Clean laundry must be stored in a suitable place
- Do not mix clean and dirty laundry
- Do not shake, sluice or rinse soiled linen
- Understand the correct colour coding for laundry in your setting
- The use of PPE for handling used laundry
- Hand hygiene after all handling of used laundry