

FNIHB Alberta Guidelines for Onsite Laundering Linens and Reusable PPE

Laundry in a healthcare facility may include bed sheets and blankets, towels, personal clothing, patient apparel, uniforms, scrubs and reusable isolation or patient gowns. Contaminated textiles and fabrics often contain high numbers of microorganisms from body substances, including blood, skin, stool, urine, vomitus, and other body tissues and fluids. Laundry services for healthcare facilities are provided either onsite or by off-site commercial laundries. To minimize transmission of infectious disease while handling linen, general good hygiene measures and consistent use of appropriate personal protective equipment is recommended. When laundry services are possible onsite, utilize the following guidelines.

Laundry Room

- Post laundering procedures at entrance of laundry room and on washing and drying machines.
- Partition the laundry room into two separate areas.
 - “Dirty” area for receiving and handling the soiled laundry.
 - “Clean” area for processing the washed items.
- Receiving areas should be equipped with negative air pressure relative to the clean areas when possible or have a door that can close.
- Handwashing facilities (hand sink with liquid hand soap and paper towels and/or alcohol-based hand rub).
- If possible, dedicate one washer for laundering reusable gowns or laundry from clients/residents sick with the outbreak illness (or those on Additional Precautions).
 - Wash environmental cleaning items such as cleaning cloths and mop heads in a separate load.

Handling of Soiled Linens

- All linen that is soiled with body fluids should be handled using the same precautions regardless of the source.
- Appropriate PPE (e.g., gloves and long sleeve gowns) should be worn while sorting soiled laundry or linens when there is a risk of clothing being contaminated by blood and bodily fluids.
- Remove gross soiling (e.g. feces) with a gloved hand and dispose into toilet. Do not remove excrement by spraying with water.
- Handle soiled laundry with minimum agitation before placing it in a laundry bag (e.g. wrap in a dry sheet or towel) at point of care to avoid contamination of environmental surfaces and people
 - Avoid sorting or pre-rinsing linen in the patient care areas.
 - Laundry bags should be tied securely and not over-filled.
 - Double bagging is not necessary and not recommended.
 - Cloth linen bags should be washed after each use and can be washed in the same cycle as the linen contained in them.
- Remove PPE including gloves once soiled laundry has been placed in the laundry bag.
- Perform hand hygiene following taking off PPE.
 - Gloves are not needed to transport the laundry bag to the soiled laundry room.



Washing Soiled Linen

- Wash and dry linen according to routine standards and laundering practices of the healthcare facility.
- Avoid overloading the machine.
- Follow detergent instructions for load size and load soiling.
- Follow manufacturer written instructions regarding amount of detergent and water temperature.
 - Use complete wash, rinse and dry cycles
 - Hot-water laundry cycles, wash with detergent or disinfectant in water at 70°C (160°F) for at least 25 minutes.
 - If low-temperature (i.e. < 70°C; < 160°F) laundry cycles are used, choose a chemical that is suitable for low-temperature washing when used at the proper concentration.
 - A disinfectant can be used to enhance the overall disinfection of the laundry process when there is heavy soiling. Use as per manufacturer's instructions.
- Run empty washer with 1 chlorine disinfectant tablet (equivalent to 1 cup of chlorine bleach) and water between loads ONLY after heavily soiled loads of linen or if patient is on Additional Precautions.
 - Chlorine bleach tablets must be stored securely and used in a manner that follows the product's posted safety data sheet.
- After loading the washer with soiled linen, clean and disinfect all high touch surfaces of the washer (washer surfaces, knobs, door pulls, buttons/switches etc.) to avoid re-soiling when it is unloaded. All washers and dryers must be left empty at the end of the operating day.
- Wash hands with soap and water after handling soiled linen.
- Follow manufacturer recommendations for the maintenance and cleaning of the washing machine and dryer. Keep a log these activities.

Handling and Storing Clean Linen

- Dry linen promptly. Laundered items should be taken out of the washer as soon as feasible to reduce the risk of contaminating the washer and formation of biofilm.
- Perform hand hygiene before removing clean linen from the washing machine.
- If the items require hanging to dry, hang in a clean area.
- Fold linen on a clean surface with clean hands.
- Store clean linen in a clean dry place such as a dedicated clean linen storage room or clean linen shelf/cart (constructed from plastic, stainless steel or suitable non-porous material that is cleanable).
 - Shelves/carts should be fully enclosed or covered with a throw-back nylon flap or durable material to prevent contamination from dust/debris and harmful pathogens
 - The bottom of the shelves should be at least 6 inches off the floor to facilitate cleaning
 - Avoid storing linen in patient care rooms. Unused linen left after patient discharge is considered contaminated. Any linen that enters a patient room should only exit that room in a soiled linen laundry bag.

Additional Considerations

The effectiveness of the laundering process in rendering laundered items hygienically clean depends on the following factors and their interactions:

- time and temperature
- mechanical action
- chemicals used
- water quality, including pH level, hardness
- rinsing requirements
- volume of the load
- model of washers and dryers
- nature and extent of soiling in the items to be laundered

Take into consideration the recommendations of the manufacturer's guidelines of the washer and dryer, materials to be laundered, and the detergent used when setting their laundry formula.

References

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