SAFE MANAGEMENT OF LINEN 2.5

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Chapter 2 – Standard Infection Control Precautions
Section 5 - Safe Management of Linen Procedure

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2.5.1 Introduction
Evidence demonstrates used linen, within healthcare setting, can harbour large numbers of potentially pathogenic micro-organisms. It is important that linen is appropriately managed to ensure contamination does not occur as this can then lead to transmission of micro-organisms to people or the environment.

The following important precautions apply to all stages of linen management including: -

- Storage
- Handling
- Bagging
- Transporting
- Laundering

National guidance relating to the management of linen uses specific terms to categorise linen:

- **Used Linen** – this term refers to socially soiled/used linen
- **Fouled Linen** – this term refers to linen contaminated with blood or other body fluids
- **Suspected/Infected Linen** – this specifically applies to linen that has been used by a patient or client who is known or suspected to be carrying potentially pathogenic micro-organisms. A risk assessment will have been undertaken to ensure additional precautions will have been put in place to prevent transmission of these micro-organisms
- **Heat Liable Linen** – refers to items which need to be washed at lower temperatures, e.g. 40°C, to avoid shrinkage

Both clean and used supplies of linen should be managed safely to prevent the transfer of micro-organisms from linen to patients/clients, staff and others as the spread of micro-organisms is primarily through direct contact.

This standard operating procedure does not specifically cover procedures relating to uniforms, however, the principles described should also apply to uniforms.
2.5.2 Responsibilities

The HAI Code of Practice is to support action to reduce the risk of HAI for patients, staff, visitors and wider public at local level. Success is dependent on change in culture where infection control is truly everybody’s business with a clear focus on the importance of good hygiene, infection control practice and education.

Service Users, staff and visitors each have an individual responsibility to ensure a safe, effective and clean physical environment in healthcare facilities. All staff have a responsibility within the organisation and must support it’s commitment to Healthcare Associated Infection (HAI) control and reduction.

See Infection Control Manual - Responsibilities

2.5.3 Incident Reporting

- Any incidents where linen has not been managed safely and appropriately should be reported to ensure future incidents can be avoided and appropriate measures taken.

2.5.4 Safe Management of Linen Procedure

2.5.4.1 Good practice points

Good practice in the use and handling of linen is essential to patient care and is managed by:

- making available a linen buggy close to the point of use.
- always placing each item directly into the designated bag/receptacle at point of use.
- not carrying used linen close to the body and/or over a distance.
- never placing and/or dropping linen onto the floor or placing on other surfaces.
- always use rack at bottom of bed if available to place linen.
- not shaking linen as this will result in the dispersal of potentially pathogenic micro-organisms and/or skin scales into the environment.
- not wrapping used linen together when disposing of it into a receptacle; individual items should be placed directly into a bag/receptacle.
- ensuring sharps or other extraneous items are not discarded into linen bags/receptacles.
never overfilling used linen bags/receptacles, all linen bags should be tied when 2/3 filled, before transporting.

- appropriately tagging and labelling linen bags for identification.
- not re-handling or sorting linen prior to laundering.
- ensuring used linen and linen bags/receptacles are stored within a designated storage area. They should not be stored in corridors.
- decontaminating hands immediately following removal and disposal of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) after handling used linen and before handling clean linen i.e. between stripping and making up a clean bed (see Infection Control Manual – Hand Decontamination)
- soiled linen is never sluiced at ward level.
- not storing clean and used linen in the same area.
- not decanting clean linen from linen trolleys/cupboards; only take what is required for the task being undertaken.

Laundering is not undertaken at ward level except in locations where this is part of patient/client rehab and a local protocol is in place.

Sleepknit system has been introduced to NHS Fife; this is a trolley based linen system. Clean bags of linen will be delivered to the ward/departments from the linen room on the ward/departments large linen trolley, the bags are then decanted and placed onto the sleepknit system trolley. The sleepknit system trolley must be covered when not in use, these covers are provided for each trolley.

Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) sheets and Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) should be referred to in order to ensure the safe management of linen, e.g. solutions being used for laundering. (Manufacturer’s instructions should also be referred to).

### 2.5.5 Avoidance of adverse linen incidents

#### 2.5.5.1 Preparation and staff protection

To avoid linen incidents staff should ensure:

- clean linen is stored in a clean, designated area or linen storage trolley with trolley doors closed when not in use.
- clean linen is **not** decanted onto different trolleys/shelves/chairs or stored in corridors when delivered as this may result in contamination.
a linen receptacle is taken to the point of care.

- PPE is worn to ensure contamination from used linen does not occur i.e.
  - A disposable plastic apron should always be worn when handling used linen
  - Disposable gloves should be worn where linen is soiled/foul
- linen is held away from the body to avoid contamination of clothing.
- soiled linen is never sluiced at ward/department level.

2.5.5.2 Colour coding for linen disposal (see figure 1, page 6)
- Socially Soiled/Used Linen – Clear plastic bag and white hamper bag
- Fouled Linen – Clear plastic bag then a white hamper bag
- Suspected and confirmed infected linen – Alginate water soluble bag, a clear plastic bag then a red hamper bag
- Patients own clothing – see NHS Fife Care of Patients Laundry Policy L12

2.5.6 Management of patient/client home laundry

Relatives should always be informed when the patients clothing is soiled and/or wet and asked to remove it for washing at their earliest convenience.

Where relatives are willing to launder patients’ clothes the clothing should be placed in a white plastic clothing bag and retained in the ward for collection. An information leaflet “Washing Clothes At Home” should be available to give to the relative. Copies are available from the Infection Control or from the Infection Control Public Folder on NHS Fife Intranet.

Clothing should have solid soiling disposed of in a sluice hopper or into a toilet, they should not be sluiced under running water as this may cause cross contamination and/or aerosolisation. Clothing should be placed in an alginate patient clothing bag, brand name “Dissolvo”. Where patients’ clothing is infected or suspected of being infected items should be placed in a “Dissolvo” bag.

An advice sheet on the use of the Dissolvo alginate bag is available from the Infection Control Public Folder on NHS Fife Intranet. Clothing/garments should be removed by relatives on a daily basis where possible.

If relatives are unwilling/unable to launder their relatives clothes, clean clothing should be labelled in order for these to be processed in the hospital laundry (see NHS Fife Policy – Care of Patients Personal Laundry L12)
2.5.7 Related Documents

- NHS Fife Policy – Care of Patients Personal Laundry - L 12
- NHS Fife Policy – Safe handling of laundry - GP21
- NHS Fife Leaflet – Patient Clothing Bag (Dissolvo)
- NHS Fife Information Sheet – Patient Clothing Bags Advice Sheet
- NHS Fife/Health Protection Scotland Leaflet – Washing Clothes At Home
## LAUNDRY SEGREGATION CHART

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Laundry/Material Type</th>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Inner Container</th>
<th>Outer Container</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Socially Soiled/used Linen, including bedding, staff uniform, theatre suits manual handling aids bed screens &amp; curtains</td>
<td>Clear Plastic Bag</td>
<td>White Hamper</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fouled</td>
<td>Clear Plastic Bag</td>
<td>White Hamper</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suspected and confirmed infected linen</td>
<td>Alginate/water soluble Bag</td>
<td>Clear Plastic Bag and in a Red Hamper</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patient Personal Clothing</td>
<td>Follow local procedure for personal laundry</td>
<td>Follow local procedure for personal laundry</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fouled (for sending to central laundry @ VHJK)</td>
<td>Clear Plastic Bag</td>
<td>White Hamper</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suspected and confirmed infected clothing (for sending to central laundry @ VHJK)</td>
<td>Alginate/water soluble Bag</td>
<td>Clear Plastic Bag and in a Red Hamper</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suspected and confirmed infected clothing (for taking home to launder)</td>
<td>Alginate Dissolve Bag</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theatre Linen</td>
<td>Treat all drapes etc as infected</td>
<td>Alginate/water soluble Bag</td>
<td>Clear Plastic Bag and in a Red Hamper</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### IMPORTANT NOTES:
1. Always handle linen with care.
2. Do not over fill any bags
3. Check all laundry. Remove pens, equipment, etc that may injure or cause damage.
4. DO NOT carry or handle linen unnecessarily.
5. Take the container (bag/hamper) to the point of use (e.g. bedside, etc)
6. Wear the appropriate PPE
7. Used linen hampers must be traceable i.e. use use a ratchet ID tag

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Container</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alginate/water soluble Bag</td>
<td>Laundry or Linen Room</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alginate Dissolve Bags</td>
<td>Receive from ward</td>
<td>0342742</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear Plastic Bag</td>
<td>Order from Laundry</td>
<td>B123638CL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Hampers</td>
<td>Laundry or Linen Room</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Linen Service Enquiries Telephone: Central Laundry @VHK on 9973/8974/8975