Laundry and Linen Handling

Appropriately managed soiled linen is rarely implicated in the transmission of infections. The consistent use of Routine Practices will almost eliminate risk of cross infection. Policies and procedures should address the collection, transport, handling, washing and drying of soiled linen, including protection of staff and hand hygiene.

Laundry policies should ensure that:

- Laundry area is in a dedicated space
- Laundry equipment is used and maintained according to manufacturers’ instructions
- Staff do not consume food or beverages in laundry areas
- Hand hygiene facilities are located in all laundry work areas
- Gross soil is removed before washing and proper washing and drying procedures are used
- Cloth linen bags are washed after each use and can be washed in the same cycle as the linen contained in them
- Clean laundry is sorted, packaged, transported and stored by methods that will ensure their cleanliness and protect them from dust and soil

All linen that is soiled with blood, body fluids, secretions or excretions should be handled using the same precautions.

- Bag/contain contaminated laundry at the point-of-care.
- Handle contaminated laundry with minimum agitation and shaking to avoid contamination of the air, surfaces and persons.
- Contain wet laundry before placing in a laundry bag e.g. wrap in a dry sheet or towel. ‘Double bagging’ is not necessary or recommended.
- All caregivers and laundry workers should be educated regarding the use/disposal of sharps when placing soiled linen in laundry bags. Workers are at risk from contaminated sharps and broken glass when sorting linen in the laundry area.
- Soiled linen should be held away from the body and uniform.
- If a laundry chute is used for soiled linen, it should discharge directly into a soiled linen collection area. The linen placed into the chute must be securely bagged and tightly closed. Linen chutes should be cleaned on a regular (i.e. monthly) basis with a diluted germicide compatible with the laundry process.
- Laundry carts should be cleaned and disinfected with a low level disinfectant daily.
- Clean linen should be covered during storage and transport to protect it from contamination.
• Only the exact amount of clean linen required should be brought to a resident’s room.
• There should be adequate separation (at least one metre) of clean and soiled linen.
• If low temperature water is used for laundry cycles, then chemicals formulated for low temperature washing at the appropriate concentration should be used. A complete wash cycle must be used.
• If bleach is used for linen disinfection, a level of at least 100 ppm of residual chlorine should be achieved for all laundry cycles.
• If linen is washed in high temperature (>71.1°C/160°F), a hot water detergent for a complete wash cycle (> 25 minutes) must be used.
• Workers should protect themselves from potential cross infection from soiled linen by wearing appropriate protective equipment (e.g. gloves, gowns or aprons and face/eye protection) when handling soiled linen.
• A dedicated hand washing sink and ABHR should be readily available in laundry areas.
• Personnel should wash their hands whenever gloves are changed or removed.
• All caregivers should receive training in procedures for handling soiled and clean linens.
• Staff working in laundry areas should receive annual education on Routine Practices and protective measures to be used when handling linen. The following areas should be stressed:
  ▪ Procedures for handling soiled linen:
  ▪ The use of protective equipment, such as gloves and gowns/aprons, when handling soiled linen.
  ▪ Hands should be washed after gloves are removed. There should be adequate handwashing facilities in the laundry area
  ▪ The importance of receiving Hepatitis B vaccine to protect the worker in the event of an accidental exposure
Additional Resources:

