Section 4

Infection Control Guidelines for the Storage and Handling of Clean and Used Linen

Issue No 3, April 2009 - Section 4
On behalf of Infection Control Policy Review Group

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TITLE: INFECTION CONTROL GUIDELINES FOR THE STORAGE AND HANDLING OF CLEAN AND USED LINEN

Policy Reference: Issue No 3, April 2009 - Section 4

Scope: Organisation Wide

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Policy Application: Throughout NHS Ayrshire and Arran

RESPONSIBILITIES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Organisation: Senior Management Team and Chief Executive

Directorate: Directors

Corporate: Senior Managers

Departmental: Heads of Wards or Departments

Local: All relevant staff

Policy Statement: Staff will store and handle clean and used linen in a manner that minimises the risk of cross infection.

Review Date: October 2011

Agreed by: Infection Control Policy Review Group

Approved by: Dr R Masterton

Date 15/04/09

Signature / Designation: (Chair – Prevention & Control of Infection Committee)
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SECTION 4

OPERATIONAL PROCEDURE FOR THE STORAGE AND HANDLING OF CLEAN AND USED LINEN

1.0 DEFINITIONS
The following definitions are used in these guidelines:

**Linen**
All items for laundering or dry cleaning. This includes common user bed linen; towels; theatre drapes; patients’ clothing; staff uniforms; reusable protective clothing; and miscellaneous items such as curtains, fleeces, support mattresses, mop heads, etc.

**Soiled Linen**
Linen that has been used and which requires laundering, but which is not fouled, infected, infested or high risk.

**Fouled Linen**
Linen that has been used and is contaminated with any body fluid, substance, secretion or excretion, e.g., urine, faeces, sputum, vomitus, blood, bile or pus.

**Infected Linen**
Linen from patients suffering from or suspected as suffering from infections as specified in this Control of Infection Manual, including patients who are being cared for using source isolation (See Section 2, Isolation Policy).

**Infested Linen**
Linen from patients with a known or suspected infestation.

**High Risk Linen**
Linen from patients suffering from or suspected as suffering from infections caused by extremely hazardous organisms as specified in this Control of Infection Manual (See Section 2, Isolation Policy).

2.0 CLEAN LINEN
Linen is used in close contact with vulnerable patients within the health care setting. Therefore, clean linen must be transported, stored and handled in a manner that protects it from contamination.

Clean linen must be stored in designated areas protected from dirt, dust and water splashing. This could entail the use of dedicated trolleys protected by heavy duty plastic sheeting, linen stores or cupboards. It must not be stockpiled on open shelves in bathrooms, treatment rooms or other any other area where contamination is likely to occur.

Staff must handle clean linen with clean hands. Plastic aprons may also be required to prevent contamination in some circumstances.
3.0 USED LINEN
Used linen can be contaminated with human skin scales, blood or other body fluids and substances that may contain large numbers of pathogenic microorganisms. Therefore, all used linen must be handled in a manner that protects patients, staff and others from cross infection.

Used linen is divided into different categories depending on the nature of the fabric and the perceived infection risk. Segregation is achieved by the use of colour coded linen hampers with additional containment for linen that is fouled, infected or infested; and high-risk linen (See Local Operational Bagging Procedures). Posters detailing the colour coding system and the use of totally water soluble bags are available and should be prominently displayed in all areas.

Used linen must be placed directly into the appropriate bag. Members of staff who carry large bundles of used linen will contaminate themselves and the environment. Linen buggies should be taken to the area where used linen is generated, rather than the linen being taken to the buggies.

Appropriate protective clothing should be worn when handling used linen e.g. a disposable plastic apron should be worn when handling large amounts of used linen, disposable gloves would be required if there is contamination with blood or body fluids, secretions or excretions.

4.0 FOULED, INFECTED AND INFESTED LINEN
Totally water soluble bags are required for fouled, infected or infested used linen (See para 1.0). The purpose of these bags is to prevent the direct handling by laundry personnel, of potentially hazardous linen. In order to ensure effective use of the bags, the following instructions must be followed.

i) Store unused bags, in their original packaging or in a sealed plastic bag, in a dry area.

ii) Items which are wet should be wrapped inside dry dirty linen.

iii) Bags must be sealed when no more than 3/4 full and should weigh no more than 15kgs.

iv) Seal the bag using the tie provided. Sealing the bag by knotting will prevent the bag opening at the start of the laundering process.

Water soluble bags containing hospital linen must be placed in a clear plastic bag to contain leakage should the bags dissolve before reaching the laundry. The clear plastic bag should then be placed inside a red hamper, which is then marked as fouled, infected or infested as appropriate. Water soluble bags containing personal clothing must be placed in a clear plastic bag and then a yellow hamper and marked as fouled, infected or infested. Personal clothing that is fouled, infected or infested must be sent to the Personal Clothing Laundry. They must not be processed in Hospital or Ward Personal Clothing Laundries.
5.0 **EXTRANEOUS ITEMS**
Extraneous items such as needles, syringes, and drainage bags containing human body fluid, have all been found in linen bags returned to the Laundry. These, on occasion, have resulted in injury to laundry workers. **It is the responsibility of all those using the Laundry to ensure that extraneous items are not sent to this department.**

6.0 **HIGH RISK LINEN**
Linen from patients suffering from or suspected as suffering from infections caused by extremely hazardous organisms as specified in the Control of Infection Manual (See Section 2, Isolation Policy) must not be sent to the Laundry. This linen must be sent for *Incineration* in a yellow (not orange) clinical waste sack. Send full details in writing to the Laundry in order that all linen incinerated can be replaced.

7.0 **HOME LAUNDERING OF SOILED PATIENTS CLOTHING**
It may be necessary for relatives to take soiled linen home for laundering. If this is the case then relatives/carers should be issued with the Ayrshire & Arran ‘Washing Clothes at Home’ leaflet (Appendix 1). Copies of this Leaflet can be obtained from ……………

8.0 **HOME LAUNDERING OF STAFF UNIFORMS**
It may be necessary for members of staff to take soiled uniforms home for laundering. If this is the case then staff should be aware of the Ayrshire & Arran ‘Washing Uniforms at Home’ leaflet (Appendix 2). Copies of this Leaflet can be obtained from Registry, Ailsa Hospital.

9.0 **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

