



IPC Topic: Environmental Controls-Laundry-Part 1 Handling dirty laundry

Use infection control actions to prevent germ spread from dry surfaces.

Infection control actions help fight the spread of infectious illnesses. If we can identify the place where germs live and recognize the actions to take to prevent the spread, we can protect ourselves and our clients. Using infection control actions can reduce the spread of germs through dry surfaces including laundry.^{1,2}

Risk: Germs are found in body fluids, on the skin, and even can be transported in the air. Germs can often be found on dry surfaces. Some of these germs can live for a very long time on surfaces— days or even weeks. These germs can spread through direct and indirect touch from dry surfaces. The dry surfaces of bedding, towels, and other linens have fluids and germs from our clients on them. Following good infection control practices can prevent the spread of germs to other clients and staff. ^{1,2,7}

Using Standard Precautions is part of the infection control actions that we take every day to reduce the risk of germ transmission.¹⁰

Soiled Laundry ^{1,2,3,4,6}

Handle soiled laundry in a manner that prevents germs from spreading to the environment and healthcare personnel clothing.

- Soiled laundry should be put in bags or contained at point of use. Do not shake, sort, or prerinse at the point of use.
- Soiled laundry should be contained in bags or containers that clearly indicate that they are soiled at the point of use. (On the floor or care area).
- Wear PPE (personal protective equipment: eye protection, masks, gloves, gowns) according to facility policy.
- Hamper covers are not required in patient/resident care areas. (Example, hampers in the patient/resident's room)
- Place bagged soiled laundry in a soiled cart in a soiled utility until transported for laundering.
- Perform hand hygiene.
- If using laundry chutes, use them in a manner to minimize the possibility of germs entering the air. HCW need to routinely clean and inspect the area as stated per policy. ⁶
- Soiled laundry rooms/areas should be negative pressure and should be separate from clean areas to reduce the risk of germ spread from leaving the dirty laundry room by the air pathway. Negative pressure is usually maintained by ventilation pulling air upward and out of the room. This promotes airflow into the room and helps keep any germs from leaving the room if a door is opened.
- Soiled laundry holding areas (soiled utility areas, laundry chute intake and discharge areas, and loading dock area where dirty laundry is transferred (if healthcare laundry is performed offsite). Because these areas will have many germs from the soiled laundry, areas should undergo a daily cleaning and disinfection consistent with other areas of the facility.
- Clean dirty clothes hampers or laundry baskets according to facility's guidance with an EPA-registered disinfectant.

- Observe contact times for the cleaning or disinfection product being used⁹
- There should be no moisture or wetness on surfaces (for example: floors, walls, folding surfaces etc.) which could serve as environment for fungal growth.

Summary: Germs live on surfaces including linens. Bedding, towels, and other linens have body fluids and germs from our clients on them. These germs can live for days or weeks on surfaces and spread through touch to clients and staff. Infection control actions can reduce the spread of germs from these dry surfaces. ^{1,2,7}

References:

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