



IPC Topic: Environmental Controls-Laundry Part 2 Washing and handling of clean linen

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

Intro: 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. ^{1,2,7}

Risk: Germs are found in body fluids, on the skin, and even transported in the air. Germs can often be found on dry surfaces. Many of the germs that live on dry surfaces can live for a very long time – days or even weeks. These germs can spread through direct and indirect touch from dry surfaces, including laundry. ^{1,2} Following good infection control practices for both dirty and clean laundry can prevent the spread of germs to other clients and staff. ^{1,2,7}

Laundering ^{1,2,8}

- Maintain the receiving area for dirty or contaminated laundry at a segregated area separate from the clean areas of the laundry.
- It is safe to wash dirty laundry from a person who is sick with other people's items.
- Use the warmest appropriate water setting and dry items completely. Heat kills a majority of germs.
- Launder items, if possible, according to the label's instructions.
- Perform hand hygiene when moving to a clean task (eg. Unloading the dryer, folding clean laundry).
- **Do not** leave damp textiles or fabrics in machines overnight.
- Use and maintain laundry equipment according to manufacturers' instructions.
- Clean laundry work areas (e.g., ironing, folding stations) cleaned and disinfected with an EPA-registered disinfectant. Read label and use facility contact time.

If the laundry is done outside of the facility: ^{1,3,4}

- The same vehicle can be used for clean and dirty, but there must be some type of physical separation.
- As clean linen is returned to the facility, linens are covered or sealed in plastic to prevent exposure to possible germs during transport.

Clean linen ^{1,2,3,4,6}

- Laundry/linen carts should be covered unless they are in use passing or stocking the linen.
- Clean linen should be stored:
 - on shelves that are clear of dirt and debris and are at minimum 8 inches away from the floor, and 2 inches away from the walls, to allow easy cleaning access.
 - Linen must be stored no closer than 18 inches from the ceiling to allow for proper ventilation and to not obstruct fire sprinklers and lighting,

- Laundered textiles may be stored in a clean staging area prior to distribution. Offsite packaging is removed. Place on clean carts which should be maintained covered for transport to laundry storage areas.
- Perform routine cleaning carts and linen storage areas per facility guidance.
- There should be no moisture or wetness in any area which could serve as environment for fungal growth.⁵

Summary: Germs live on surfaces including linens. These germs can be there for days or weeks and spread through touch to clients and staff. Infection control actions can reduce the spread of germs from these dry surfaces through the touch or air pathways. Preventing germs from collecting on clean laundry helps prevent the spread of germs to clients and each other.^{1,2,7}

References:

1. CDC: Environmental Infection Control Guidelines: <https://www.cdc.gov/infectioncontrol/guidelines/environmental/index.html#d>
2. CDC: Infection Control: Project First Line: Germs live in the Environment: https://www.cdc.gov/infection_control/projectfirstline/index.html
3. CDC: HAI: Environmental Cleaning Procedures: <https://www.cdc.gov/hai/prevent/resource-limited/cleaning-procedures.html>
4. Guidelines for Environmental Infection control in Health-Care Facilities: Recommendations of CDC and Healthcare Infection Control Practices Advisory Committee (HICPAC): <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr5210a1.htm>
5. Pediatric Infectious Disease Journal, "Mucormycosis Outbreak Associated with Hospital Linens": https://journals.lww.com/pidj/Abstract/2014/05000/Mucormycosis_Outbreak_Associated_With_Hospital.9.aspx
6. CDC's Core Infection Prevention and Control Practices for Safe Healthcare Delivery in All Settings: <https://www.cdc.gov/hicpac/recommendations/core-practices.html>
7. CDC: Infection Control: Project Firstline: Germs Live in the Environment: <https://www.cdc.gov/infectioncontrol/projectfirstline/healthcare/germs-environment.html>