

## **8 HEALTHCARE LAUNDRY MANAGEMENT**

### **8.1 Introduction**

The objective of the laundry system is to provide a properly designed laundering programme in a safe and sanitary environment, and ensuring the supply of clean and hygienic laundry. Health service managers and staff share the responsibility for achieving this objective.

Health service managers are responsible for providing:

- an appropriate and safe laundry facility;
- standard procedures and guidelines for handling, using and laundering clean and contaminated linen; and
- training, educating and instructing staff about potential infectious hazards and techniques to prevent the spread of infection

Linen used in healthcare facilities carries many micro-organisms. Used linen that is soiled with blood, urine, faeces or other body substances may be particularly infectious. Processing soiled linen consists of collecting, transporting and sorting the linen before it is washed, followed by storing and distribution.

HCWs are responsible for ensuring that:

- standard precautions apply when handling clean and contaminated linen;
- linen is free of foreign matter such as sharps and instruments before it is sent for laundering;
- soiled and infectious linen is appropriately treated and handled in accordance with the facility's policies and procedures; and
- used linen is not sorted in patient care areas.

### **8.2 Using personal protective equipment**

When collecting, handling, transporting, sorting or washing soiled linen, housekeeping and laundry staff should wear:

- household utility gloves;
- closed shoes that protect feet from sharp items and from blood and body fluid spillages;
- protective eyewear; and
- plastic or rubber aprons.

### **8.3 Collecting and transporting soiled linen**

The following steps should be taken when collecting and transporting soiled linen.

- Place used linen in bags or in linen trolleys with lids. If linen is heavily soiled with blood and/or body fluids, it should be placed in a leak-proof bag or a container with a lid.
- Handle soiled linen as little as possible and avoid shaking linen to prevent the spread of micro-organisms into the environment and to people.
- Linen should not be sorted or washed in patient care areas.
- Transport collected soiled linen in trolley carts with lids or covered carts to the laundry processing area once or twice daily.
- Transport soiled linen and clean linen separately, using separate trolleys labelled accordingly.

## **8.4 Sorting soiled linen**

Sorting soiled linen is important because in addition to linen soiled with blood and body fluids, linen from places such as operating theatres, labour wards and other procedural areas sometimes contain sharp instruments and soiled dressings soaked with blood and body fluids. When sorting linen, heavy utility gloves, protective eyewear and plastic aprons should be worn. Any items found during sorting should be disposed of properly.

## **8.5 Laundering linen**

The following steps should be taken when laundering soiled linen.

- Separately wash heavily soiled linen from non-soiled linen.
- Use the washing machine's time cycle according to the manufacturer's instructions.
- Water temperatures should be above 71°C (160°F)
- When wash cycle is completed, linen should be checked for cleanliness and rewashed if still stained or dirty.

### ***8.5.1 Storing, transporting and distributing clean linen***

The following measures should be taken when storing, transporting and distributing clean linen.

- Store clean linen in clean, dry closed storage cupboards.
- Use physical barriers to separate folding and storage room from soiled areas.
- Clean and soiled linen should be transported separately in separate trolleys.
- Clean linen should be covered during transport to avoid contamination.

## **8.6 Laundry staff**

Good staff practices help reduce the risk of cross-contamination and prevent injury. Therefore, staff should:

- be adequately trained in standard precautions, including hand washing and the risks involved if undertaking other tasks within the facility (e.g. food preparation, patient care). These activities should never be done in laundry areas;
- be educated and trained (and supervised, if appropriate) in the safe use of equipment and machinery, and in safe work practices, including safe manual handling techniques;
- wear appropriate protective clothing and wear appropriate gloves when sorting laundry;
- not eat or smoke in the laundry area;
- not handle linen if they have exfoliative skin conditions (e.g. conditions where skin flakes off), unhealed wounds or rashes, unless appropriate protective measures are adopted (such as covering wounds with bandages).