

Laundry Handling

Safe laundry handling protects the worker from exposure to potentially infectious materials during collection, handling and sorting of contaminated textiles. This can be accomplished through the use of personal protective equipment (PPE), proper work practices, containment, labeling and hazard communication. In addition, personnel must handle, store, process and transport linens in a way that will prevent the spread of infection.

Laundry refers to both residents' personal laundry cleaned by the facility as well as facility-owned textiles such as linens, privacy curtains, tablecloths, etc.

What is Contaminated Laundry?

OSHA defines contaminated laundry as "laundry which has been soiled with blood or other potentially infectious materials (OPIM) or may contain sharps." Laundry (fabrics and textiles) may contain high numbers of microorganisms from body substances including blood, skin, stool, urine, vomitus and other body tissues and fluids.

Measures to Safely Handle Laundry

- Wear appropriate PPE (e.g., gloves and protective garments) when handling soiled fabrics and textiles.
- Never carry soiled linen against the body. Always place it in the designated container.
- Handle contaminated textiles and fabrics with minimum agitation to avoid contamination of air, surfaces and people.
- Bag or otherwise contain contaminated textiles and fabrics at the point of use.
 - Use leak-resistant containment for fabrics and textiles contaminated with blood or body substances.
 - Identify bags or containers for contaminated textiles with labels or color coding.
- Launder soiled linens in a designated area, which should:
 - Be a dedicated space for performing laundering of soiled linen
 - Have handwashing facilities or hand sanitizer
 - Not contain any food, beverage or personal items
 - Have floors and walls made of durable materials that can withstand the exposures of the area (e.g., large quantities of water and steam)
 - Have a separation between the soiled linen and clean linen storage areas
- Package, transport and store clean textiles and fabrics by methods that will ensure their cleanliness and protect them from dust and soil during transport. State regulations and/or accrediting standards may dictate the procedures for this activity.
 - Place clean linen in a properly cleaned cart and cover the cart with disposable material or a properly cleaned reusable textile material that can be secured to the cart.
 - Clean, uncovered/unwrapped textiles can be stored in a clean location for short periods of time. Such textiles can be stored in convenient places for use during the provision of care, provided the textiles can be kept dry, free from soil and body-substance contamination, and not be exposed to common traffic.
 - Wrap individual bundles of clean textiles in plastic or other suitable material.
 - Store clean linen on carts with a solid bottom. The bottom shelf should be at least 6 inches from the floor to allow for floor cleaning.
- Any linen dropped on the floor should be treated as soiled laundry and placed in the soiled laundry.