**Linens**

**Date Implemented:**

**Review/Updated Date:**

**Policy**

Linens, both personal and shared, shall be cleaned, delivered, and maintained in a manner to ensure infection prevention and control.

Pathogen transmission on linens can occur through direct contact with contaminated linens and aerosols generated during the sorting and handling of contaminated linens. Pathogens can also contaminate clean linens if they are not appropriately transported and stored. Proper linen management is crucial to breaking the chain of infection.

Laundry includes residents’ personal clothing, linens (such as sheets, blankets, pillows), towels, washcloths, and items from departments such as nursing, dietary, rehabilitation services, beauty shops, and environmental services.

If nursing homes utilize off-site laundry services, a written agreement must be in place. The written agreement should provide identification of infection control and prevention techniques utilized during service.

If onsite laundry is performed, the nursing home must ensure linens are being cleaned and disinfected appropriately. All laundry equipment shall be maintained per manufacturer’s instructions. Laundry staff should have appropriate procedures to verify automatic chemical detergents are being utilized during the laundering process including a system of marking detergent containers.

**Procedures**

Used Linens:

* Collection and transportation of used linen starts at the point of use (resident care area).
* All used linens should be handled utilizing standard precautions, including hand hygiene and the use of appropriate PPE.
* Handling of used linens should be minimized including:
	+ Not sorting or rinsing used linen at the point of use.
	+ Not shaking used linen or holding it close to the body.
* Place used linens into designated bags or other appropriate containers for transport at the point of use.
	+ Single bags of sufficient tensile strength are adequate for containing laundry. The only time that double bagging is necessary is if the outside of the bag is visibly contaminated or is observed to be wet through to the outside of the bag.
	+ Bags/containers should be leak resistant in the event the laundry is wet and capable of soaking through a cloth bag.
	+ Assure bags are securely tied and/or containers closed to prevent leakage during transport.
	+ Used laundry containers or carts must be disinfected on a scheduled basis that is developed by the nursing home, and when visibly soiled.
* Laundry from transmission-based precaution rooms does not require special bagging or categorizing.
* If a laundry chute is utilized, care must be maintained to maximize dispersion of aerosols from contaminated laundry. For example, all bags are closed prior to tossing in the chute to assure there are no loose articles of linen in the chute.
* Sorting and Laundering Used Linens:
	+ There are various methods that can be utilized for sorting used linens including:
		- Sorting before washing which protects the machinery and linen from objects that should not be washed, reduces the potential for recontamination of clean linens, and allows for customization of laundry process based on mix of linen and types of soil.
		- Sorting after washing minimizes staff exposure to pathogens in used linens and reduces airborne microbial contamination in the laundry area.
	+ If laundering is performed onsite:
		- A dirty area should be available to receive and handle used linens.
		- Appropriate PPE and standard precautions shall always be utilized when sorting used linen.
		- To minimize the potential for contamination of clean linen, the dirty area should be a negative air pressure relative to the clean area. If a negative air pressure is not present, staff should assure that fans in place are not blowing air from the used laundry area into the clean laundry area.
	+ Sorting of used linen includes the removal of any hard objects that are inadvertently mixed in with used linens.
	+ Following sorting of used linens, staff shall remove gloves and perform hand hygiene.

Laundry Process:

* Washing machines should initially flush and rinse with clean water.
* Assure adequate cleaning agents and other laundry additives are added to the washing machine as appropriate, based on manufacturer recommendations and set up.
	+ The antimicrobial action of the laundering process is the result of a combination of mechanical, thermal, and chemical factors.
	+ Nursing homes should follow the fabric care instructions, laundry detergent labels, and washing machine instructions to prevent damage to laundered items and maintain detergent effectiveness.
	+ If hot water cycles are used, wash with detergent in water at or above 160⁰F for at or greater than 25 minutes.
	+ If low-temp washing cycles are used, choose chemicals suitable for low-temp washing at proper use concentration. Per the CMS Requirements of Participation, low temperature washing machines are 71 to 77⁰F utilizing a 125-part-per-million (PPM) chlorine bleach rinse. Note – the nursing home is not required to monitor water temperatures during laundry processing cycles, unless specified by state rules. A chlorine bleach rinse is not required for all laundry items processed in low temperature washing environments due to the availability of modern laundry detergents that are able to produce hygienically clean laundry without the presence of chlorine bleach. The nursing home must refer to the manufacturer’s recommendations for the use of the detergent and items being laundered.
* Wet laundry must not be left in washing machines overnight.
* Drying of clean linens should follow manufacturer’s recommendations to assure adequate infection prevention and control techniques are utilized. Per the fire marshal recommendations, nursing homes should assure that appropriate cooling cycles are utilized during drying to prevent spontaneous combustion of linens.

Clean Linens:

* A separate area shall be maintained apart from the dirty linen area to process clean linens.
* Clean linen must be packaged to prevent contamination during transport and storage. Appropriate methods of packaging clean linens include but are not limited to:
	+ Placing clean linens in a hamper lined with an unused liner, which is then closed or covered.
	+ Placing clean linens in a properly cleaned cart and covering the cart with disposable material or a properly cleaned reusable textile material that can be secured to the cart.
	+ Wrapping individual bundles of clean linen in plastic or other suitable material and sealing or taping the bundles.
* Separate carts should be used to transport clean and used linens. If the same cart must be used, the cart must be cleaned and disinfected before transporting clean linens.
* Clean linen must be stored in dedicated clean areas in a manner that keeps them dry and free from soil and contamination. Storage rooms should be designed to minimize dust contamination and maintained at room temperature and humidity ranges. Utilizing separate clean linen storage rooms with a closing door is the most secure way to reduce the risk of environmental contamination to clean linen.

**Resources**

CMS. (2017, Nov. 2). *State Operations Manual, Appendix PP – Guidance to Surveyors for Long Term Care Facilities, F880*. <https://www.cms.gov/Medicare/Provider-Enrollment-and-Certification/GuidanceforLawsAndRegulations/Downloads/Appendix-PP-State-Operations-Manual.pdf>

CDC. (2020, June 10). *Infection Prevention Training | LTCF*. <https://www.cdc.gov/longtermcare/training.html>