

Appendix 20: SARS Contingency Plan: Laundry Arrangements for Used and Infected Linen

General Requirements

1. Current guidance on the handling and laundering of linen; the importance of securing disinfection of used and infected linen; and the basic principles of infection control are contained in **HSG(95)18** . “Hospital Laundry Arrangements for Used and Infected Linen”, NHS Executive, April 1995. All HPSS organisations have been using HSG(95)18 as the benchmark standard.
2. HPSS organisations should review their current policies and procedures for laundry arrangements against HSG(95)18. This review should include specific issues in relation to the impact that a possible SARS outbreak would have in terms of laundry arrangements. Where laundry services are not provided in-house, reviews must include policies and procedures in place with laundry contractors **including monitoring of standards as set out in HSG(95)18**.
3. Should a SARS outbreak occur, including should a single patient present, **all linen, including staff scrub suits and patients personal clothing, must be treated as infected linen**, therefore specific guidance contained in HSG(95)18 with respect to infected linen will apply. **Under no circumstances should dry cleaning processes be used**. Where disposable scrub suits are used these should be treated as Clinical Waste.
4. Should a SARS outbreak occur, **under no circumstances should any item of linen, uniform or clothing be taken home to launder. Failure to comply with this requirement shall be considered a disciplinary offence**. A dedicated SARS laundry is being identified should a major outbreak occur.
5. The Ambulance Service should consider their contingency plan to ensure that their policies and procedures for ambulance linen and staff uniforms include laundry arrangements in accordance with HSG(95)18 with respect to infected linen.

Training and Monitoring

6. It is essential that: -
 - all staff are trained in new handling procedures defined below in relation to SARS;
 - if these arrangements are initiated in the event of a SARS outbreak, the monitoring and auditing of Trust procedures for handling infected linen are undertaken on a daily basis.

Protection of Laundry Staff

7. Additional Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) above that which is stipulated in HSG(95)18 i.e. waterproof aprons and gloves, is not considered necessary.

8. Staff handling infected linen during their working hours should not be employed on other dirty or clean laundry processes unless they have been through staff dirty/clean changing facilities. Hand washing, changing facilities and showering facilities should be provided in accordance with current legislation and clean overalls should be available to staff at each new shift or work period. Dirty overalls used by Laundry Staff should be treated as Infected Linen.
9. In accordance with the adopted staff movement restrictions in place should a SARS outbreak occur, Trusts should review their policies and procedures for the movement of laundry staff within hospitals as part of their SARS plan.
10. Trusts should review their laundry staff awareness of cross-infection control procedures in relation to laundry operations and review/implement training needs as appropriate for all laundry operatives.
11. Trusts should review their current occupational health supervision of all laundry staff in the event of a potential SARS outbreak.
12. Where laundry services are not provided in house, staff protection measures for contractor's staff should be reviewed and monitored to ensure that the standards applicable to HPSS Trusts are applied for contracted services in accordance with HSG(95)18. New Laundry contracts should include for the regular monitoring of standards to ensure that they are being applied.

Laundry Capacity and Standards

13. All Trusts should review their existing in-house and contracted laundry arrangements in terms of capacity and current standards. Issues to consider include: -
 - Do existing laundry facilities have equipment of adequate capacity to cope with an increased demand of infected linen?
 - Can other equipment be designated to be used for infected linen?
 - Are other laundry stream demands expected to reduce because of a reduction of other clinical work in the hospital and has this been considered in balancing demand?
 - Have relationships with other Trusts been established to develop contingency arrangements for support in terms of laundry capacity.
 - Effluent drains from designated washer extractors must be sealed (closed pipe) from the machine to the manhole (preferable situated outside the Laundry).
 - Vent pipes from designated washer extractors should be routed outside the laundry.

Handling Protocol

14. This handling protocol has been developed to ensure **that the physical handling of infected linen in a SARS outbreak should be reduced as far as possible**. Trusts must therefore consider their existing handling arrangements and put in place contingency arrangements to be able to effectively adapt to a SARS outbreak. This protocol is summarised in the flowchart at Appendix 1.

Patient Isolation Room

When handling infected linen at the patient isolation facility, **it should be handled carefully and not shaken** prior to bagging. Bagging of linen should be carried out immediately on removal from the bed. Infected linen should be **carefully** placed into a hot water soluble bag. The bag should then be sealed with the cold water soluble tie attached to the bag. At the isolation room lobby/anteroom, the sealed bag should be placed in a **RED colour-coded** polythene or nylon/polyester laundry bag in accordance with HSG(95)18 Appendix A. The RED colour-coded bag should be supported by a propriety bag holder (either a figure of 8 or hooped holder). Healthcare staff shall securely fasten the RED colour-coded bag when it is two-thirds full and attach an identification tag in accordance with Trust procedures. The RED colour-coded bag shall remain in the lobby/anteroom awaiting collection by support staff.

If the isolation room does not have a lobby, the member of staff who is working in the isolation room should place the water soluble bag into a RED colour-coded bag that is being held open by another member of staff who is directly outside the room. The RED colour-coded bag shall then be securely fastened and tagged and taken to the ward infected linen holding area. This area should be secure, vermin proof, waterproof and have washable surfaces.

Collection at Isolation Room Lobby/Anteroom/Ward Infected Linen Holding Area

Support staff will collect colour-coded bags from the isolation room/anteroom or ward infected linen holding area and handle carefully onto open mesh type trolleys that are easily decontaminated.

On completion of bag collection from the designated area (including infected linen bags from local staff changing facilities), the trolley must be immediately taken to the dedicated infected linen storage area (see below) and covered by washable (to infected linen standard) full covers.

Staff Changing Rooms

Staff changing rooms should have designated dirty/clean areas if possible. Staff shall remove and carefully place their dirty Scrubs into a hot water soluble bag in the dirty area. Bagging of Scrubs should be carried out immediately following removal. The bag should then be sealed using the cold-water soluble tie attached to the bag.

A RED colour-coded bag supported by a suitable bag holder shall be kept in the dirty side of the staff changing room. Healthcare staff shall place the sealed bag in the RED colour-coded bag. Healthcare staff shall securely fasten the colour-coded bag when it is two-thirds full and attach an identification tag.

The RED colour-coded bag shall remain in the staff changing room awaiting collection by support staff.

Support staff will collect RED colour-coded bags from the staff changing facility and handle carefully onto trolleys (as above).

Collection at Staff Changing Room

Support staff will collect RED colour-coded bags from preferably the dirty area of the changing room and handle carefully onto trolleys. On completion of bag collection from the designated area including infected linen bags from isolation room lobbies/anterooms and ward infected linen holding areas, the trolley must be immediately taken to the dedicated infected linen storage area and covered by washable (to infected linen standard) full covers.

Collection at Storage Area and transfer to Laundry

Trusts should identify a dedicated infected linen storage area that has the necessary accommodation to enable loaded trolleys to be stored awaiting collection by the laundry vehicle. Storage areas should be protected from the elements, vermin proof and have washable surfaces with easy access for laundry vehicles. Storage Areas should be secure.

The vehicle which is used to transport infected linen to the laundry, simultaneous transport of clean linen (or other goods) and infected linen is not permitted.

The loaded trolleys will be transferred to the vehicle for onward transfer to the laundry with trolleys being restrained in the vehicle to restrict movement.

A full audit trail for handling and transporting of laundry is required.

Laundry

The loaded trolleys will be transferred from the vehicle directly into the laundry. **Under no circumstances should RED colour-coded bags be opened in the laundry and laundry sorted.** The RED colour-coded bag must be transferred to the designated washer extractor before opening. This can be achieved by tipping the inner bag/s out of the outer colour-coded bag directly into the machine. The outer RED colour-coded bag (if washable) can then be placed in the machine followed by the trolley covers. If polythene RED colour-coded bags are used, these should be disposed off as Clinical Waste.

A central disinfection area or barrier room for infected linen is desirable

After each transfer, the vehicle interior and trolleys must be disinfected by an approved infection control technique i.e. steam cleaning, at a suitable cleaning station.

The decontaminated trolleys can then be loaded with ward clean linen requirements and transferred to the vehicle for onward transfer to the ward/clean linen store.

Laundries should be cleaned at least daily. This process should involve cleaning all surfaces and all laundry machinery including washers, dryers and ironing presses, with detergent and warm water.

