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Laundry for Care Homes

A guide by JTM

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Running a care home is a constant juggling act and the laundry room is no exception. Whether you are starting from scratch or upgrading existing facilities, this guide gives you everything you need to know when handling and processing laundry in a care home or nursing home - and how to make sure you get it right.



The Laundry Room

The most important thing is to set aside a dedicated room for laundry processes. Good ventilation is key, including access to an outside wall to enable tumble dryers to intake air from outside and also to allow air to circulate around the room freely.

As with any room in the care home, hygiene must be carefully considered. In the laundry room this includes flooring and surfaces, which should be made from wipe-clean, impermeable materials which cannot absorb fluids to reduce the risk of cross-contamination from soiled linen.

The room should also be cleaned on a daily basis and you may want to consider using a sterile air purifier, which can keep air clean and destroy airborne bacteria or viruses such as MRSA, SARS and C. difficile.

The layout of your laundry room is important too and a well-designed laundry facility can maximise efficiency to save time and money. Ask for JTM's free Laundry Room Design Guide, which combines years of sector experience with the latest design ideas to help you make best use of any space.



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Laundry Segregation

The most basic requirement in any laundry room is the need to keep dirty, soiled and clean linen separate, preventing the risk of cross-contamination through effective infection control procedures.

Dirty Linen

When dirty linen is brought into the laundry room, it should be kept in appropriate trolleys or storage areas until it is ready for washing. It is essential that infected or soiled linen is kept apart from dirty linen and washed separately.



Infected or Soiled Linen

Linen which has been soiled, contaminated with blood, or used by someone with a known infection, must be kept separate from other laundry, stored in a sealed bag or trolley and only opened to be loaded into the washing machine.

One simple way to process infected or soiled linen is with red alginate bags, which can be sealed, stored in laundry bags and placed straight into the washing machine, where the bag will dissolve during the wash.

Whichever method you choose, the easiest way to identify infected or soiled linen, and make sure it is kept separate, is by using different colour bags or trolleys. A system of red or blue bags, for example, is a good way of making sure all staff can quickly and easily establish which linen is infected. Of course, these bags should not be reused for dirty or clean linen.

Clean Linen

Once the wash is complete, clean linen should be stored in storage systems that are off the floor and not placed on work surfaces. JTM's range of storage solutions offers a wide choice, including some with individual boxes for each patient or room, to make sure the right garments are returned to the right people. You may also want to consider a labelling system, which can label clothes quickly and easily for added efficiency.

Clothes rails are also available for garments which have been ironed but make sure you consider the capacity. Rails that have been designed for domestic use are not suitable for most care homes, so look for heavy duty clothes rail such as a Z-Rail which can hold more items.



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Laundry Handling and Processing

All staff that are involved in laundry processes is to be given full training on infection control procedures, how to reduce cross-contamination of clean and soiled laundry, and how to use all appliances correctly. This is essential in order to prevent the spread of infection during the handling and washing of linen.

Handling Soiled Linen

From the bedroom to the laundry room, care should always be taken when handling infected or soiled linen. Staff should wear disposable aprons and gloves when removing bed sheets and blankets to avoid contaminating themselves or their clothes, and linen should be placed in the correct trolley according to the infection control procedures already mentioned.

The linen should then be taken directly to the laundry room, and not left in public areas or outside the laundry room. It is important not to over fill trolleys or bags, which must be kept sealed.

If any staff uniform becomes soiled with blood or any other bodily fluids it should be changed immediately and treated in the same way as soiled or contaminated linen. Do not allow the staff member to take the uniform home. Domestic machines cannot guarantee the removal of bacteria and it could lead to contamination in the home.

Washing Soiled Linen

There are two options to ensure that any infection is removed from soiled linen:

1. Wash on a disinfection cycle, which will wash at an appropriate temperature to kill any bacteria present in the linen. This is normally a hot wash of 65°C for 10 minutes, or 71°C for three minutes within the wash cycle, which is sufficient to remove any contamination.
2. Some fabrics are not suitable for a hot disinfection cycle. In these cases, specialist non-biological detergents such as Fabrix can be used, which have been scientifically proven to destroy the H1N1 flu virus, MRSA and C. difficile spores at temperatures from 30°C.

It is advised to wash dirty linen before infected or soiled linen and the machine should not be overloaded to allow items to circulate during the wash.

Remember that staff should always wash their hands if they have come into contact with any soiled linen whilst not wearing gloves. They should also dispose of aprons or gloves in the appropriate soiled waste bin to prevent cross-contamination.



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Meeting Regulations

WRAS Waste Water Regulations

Any organisation washing soiled or contaminated linen must adhere to the Water Regulations Advisory Scheme (WRAS) Category 5 waste water regulations. These regulations prevent contaminated water from entering into the water supply and although many commercial washing machines are designed to meet them, some are not.

Check with your service provider that all of your washing machines are compliant. If not, they will need to advise on remedial action to comply with regulations.



Other Regulations

In addition to WRAS, there are a number of other regulations to which you may need to conform, depending on your individual circumstances.

These include:

- Health and Safety at Work Act (1974) and Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (1999)
- Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations (2002)
- Controls assurance standard for infection control, Department of Health (2002)
- CFPP0104 choice framework for local Policy and Procedures 01-04 - decontamination of linen for health and social care



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Laundry Appliances

The type and number of washing machines, tumble dryers and ironers you need will depend on the size and nature of your care or nursing home. JTM offers a range of appliances including market-leading washing machines which meet WRAS regulations and offer a variety of wash cycles to meet your needs, including suitable disinfection programmes.

Washing Machines & Tumble Dryers

For smaller care homes the Miele PW6065 is the standout washing machine, which offers a thermal disinfection programme and adheres to NHS CFPP 01-04 for added peace of mind. A matching tumble dryer is also available, providing consistency and ease of use for staff.

If you are in need of greater capacity, JTM offers a range of washing machines and tumble dryers for even the largest care homes. The Miele PW6321 has a capacity of 32kg and comes with a fully programmable control system, which allows staff to set bespoke wash temperatures and times in line with the latest recommendations for the disinfection of soiled linen.

Finishing

Once the wash is complete, there are a variety of appliances which can help to make sure garments and linen are left in the best possible condition before being returned to rooms.

Rotary ironers can drastically reduce the amount of time needed to iron linen without compromising on results, while ironing tables provide a solid base for finishing garments, complete with a large iron, steam generator and vacuum table.

Laundry Room Accessories

From first aid kits and waste bins, to storage solutions and colour coded trolleys, be prepared for every situation with a large range of accessories designed to help streamline your laundry room and reduce the risk of infection too.

These include:

- Colour-coordinated laundry storage systems
- Laundry trolleys and carts to ensure quick and easy movement
- Sensor/pedal operated bins or dispensers to keep disposable aprons, paper towels and contaminated waste separate
- Mop washing machine designed specifically for the regular cleaning of wash mop heads
- First aid kit



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