

Sample Policy: Laundry Hygiene in the Shelter Setting

TITLE: Laundry Procedures as it Relates to Infection Control

SCOPE: Shelter staff, volunteers, and clients

PURPOSE: To provide guidelines to staff, volunteers and residents who handle linens and laundry in a safe and effective manner to reduce the risk of spread of infectious diseases

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

For the purpose of this policy, all linens and personal laundry of clients should be considered contaminated and should be treated carefully to avoid spread of infectious disease. Scabies, lice, and other bacterial pathogens (staphylococcal and streptococcal bacteria) are difficult or impossible to see. Laundry should be handled as little as possible. If possible, clients should handle their own laundry.

POLICY/PROCEDURE:

I. General Practices

- Staff should wear **gloves** when in contact with any used or worn laundry items, whether obvious contamination is visible or not.
- **Gowns or aprons** should be worn whenever it is likely that a staff person's clothing could come in contact with laundry.

II. Laundry Washed by Shelter Staff on Premises

- Use a hot wash cycle (at least 105-110 F for 10 minutes) followed by thorough drying in a hot dryer (160 F). This process is sufficient to decontaminate laundry. No other additives such as bleach are necessary to sanitize laundry, unless stain removal is desired.
- Any kitchen laundry or other items used by staff (towels, aprons, etc) should be washed and dried in the above manner.
- Staff/agency laundry should be washed in batches separate from client bedding and clothing.
- If linens are heavily soiled with feces, large amounts of solid material should be disposed of in a toilet. Handling of feces should be avoided whenever possible. If rinsing is required, staff should take care to minimize handling and avoid splashing.
- If possible clients should be asked to rinse their own linens when they are soiled.
- Wet linens should be stored in a **plastic bag** while awaiting final wash to avoid any leaking and reduce odor.
- Dispose of linens if soiling is severe.

III. Laundry Supplied by a Laundry Service

- Linen awaiting pick up by a laundry service should be stored in a contained bin or bag so that laundry cannot come in contact with clients, staff, the floor, or other clean items.
- Wet bedding should be placed in a plastic bag inside the bin so that leaking cannot occur.

- Only large amounts of feces that can be easily removed should be disposed of in the toilet. No further rinsing or handling should be done by shelter staff.

IV. Bedding Stored for Returning Clients

- Used linen may not be transferred to a different client.
- Used bedding should be stored such that the bedding of different clients is not touching it. This will prevent cross contamination.

V. Supplies and Equipment

- Shelters should maintain washers and dryers in good working order or should contract with a Laundry Service for routine delivery and pick-up.
- If laundry is done on site, the water temperatures should be at least 105-110 F.
- Shelters should supply gloves, gowns or aprons, laundry detergent, plastic bags, and plastic laundry baskets or laundry bins.

Developed by Health Care for the Homeless Network, Public Health – Seattle & King County, WA