

TIPS FOR MEETING THE LINEN REQUIREMENTS IN SKILLED NURSING FACILITIES

The proper handling, storing, processing, and transporting of all linens and laundry is necessary to produce hygienically clean laundry and reduce the risk of spreading infections in LTC.^{1,2} The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) regulations³ require facilities to develop policies and procedures to educate staff about linens and laundry services that address how personnel must “handle, store, process, and transport linen so as to prevent the spread of infection.” CMS Surveyors will review the facilities’ policy and procedures about linen and laundry handling.⁴ The facility must monitor to ensure that the laundry practices are implemented, any deviations from practices should be identified, and corrective actions are put in place.

We have listed some tips to meeting the components of the regulatory requirements based on a review of common reasons facilities are cited for non-compliance with linens regulations.

Use Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) when handling linens

To protect all staff including nursing and housekeeping from contaminants during laundry operations, they must use PPE.

TIP: Ensure staff practice hand hygiene before putting on (i.e. donning) and after removal of PPE (i.e. doffing) but particularly after removal of gloves.

TIP: Wear tear-resistant gloves when handling and laundering soiled linens.

TIP: If there is risk of splashing (e.g. if laundry is washed by hand) when laundering soiled linens, staff should in addition to gowns and gloves always wear face protection (e.g. face shield, goggles).

TIP: Removal of PPE should be done in the resident’s room or laundry room not outside in hallway, nurses station or some other common area.

Linen and Laundry Handling

Staff should handle all used laundry as potentially contaminated and use standard precautions (e.g. gloves, gowns when sorting and rinsing).

TIP: Always wear gloves before handling linen (e.g. bed sheets, towels) and change them between residents and wash your hands after removing the gloves.

TIP: Never move or carry soiled linen against the body. Always place it in the designated container to prevent spread onto the staff’s clothing or gowns.

¹ CDC Linen and Laundry Management. https://www.cdc.gov/hai/prevent/resource-limited/laundry.html#anchor_1585333789098

² CDC Guidelines for Environmental Infection Control in Health-Care Facilities: recommendation of the CDC Healthcare Infection Control Practice Advisory Committee (HICPAC) July 2019 Section G Laundry and Linens pg. 113 to 119. available at <https://www.cdc.gov/infectioncontrol/pdf/guidelines/environmental-guidelines-P.pdf>

³ eCFR :: 42 CFR 483.80 -- Infection control. <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-42/chapter-IV/subchapter-G/part-483/subpart-B/section-483.80>

⁴ See CMS State Operating Manual Appendix PP from 2-3-23 available at <https://www.cms.gov/medicare/provider-enrollment-and-certification/guidanceforlawsandregulations/downloads/appendix-pp-state-operations-manual.pdf>

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Linen and Laundry Handling (cont.)

TIP: Carefully roll up soiled linen to prevent contamination of the air, surfaces, staff, and/or residents. Do not shake linen! Moving or shaking linens can aerosolize pathogens causing spread to others or contamination of the environment.

TIP: Do not sort and rinse contaminated laundry at the point of use, in hallways, or other open resident care spaces as this increases the risk of spread and contamination. It should be done in the designated laundry room area.

TIP: Make sure contaminated laundry is bagged or contained at the point of collection (e.g. location where it was used) not in the entry way or hallway. This will reduce the risk spreading pathogens elsewhere in the facility or to others.

TIP: Place soiled linen into a clearly labeled, leak-proof container (e.g. bag) in the resident care area. Do not transport soiled linen by hand outside the specific resident care area from where it was removed. Make sure all containers and bags are leak proof.

Transport of Laundry

The facility practices must include how staff will handle and transport the laundry with appropriate measures to prevent cross-contamination.

TIP: Make sure contaminated linen and laundry bags are not held against your body when transporting.

TIP: Clean linens and resident clothes must be transported by methods (e.g. covered or bagged or in container) that ensure cleanliness and protect from dust and soil during intra or inter-facility loading, transport, and unloading.

TIP: Separate carts must be used for transporting clean from contaminated linen. If this is not possible, the contaminated linen cart should be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected per facility protocol before being used to move clean linens. Regardless, clean linens and contaminated linens should never be transported or stored at the same time on a single cart.

TIP: All contaminated linen carts must be cleaned and disinfected whenever visibly soiled and according to a schedule developed by the facility.

TIP: Clean resident's laundry should not be stored in the laundry room with dirty or soiled linens and when transporting resident's clean laundry, it should be done to prevent contamination such as use of covers or in a container (e.g. bag, box, or drawer).

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Linen Storage

TIP: Clean linen must always be kept separate from contaminated linen. The use of separate rooms, closets, or other designated spaces with a closing door provides the most secure methods for reducing the risk of accidental contamination.

TIP: Ensure the door remains closed when not in use, and that the clean linen room is not easily accessible by residents or visitors.

TIP: Linens must be stored in room or cart that have a cover over the clean linens at all times to prevent getting contaminated while waiting to be used.

TIP: Make sure that linen carts are kept closed after linens are removed for use to help prevent contamination of the remaining clean linens while the cart is being moved, stored, or waiting for use between residents.

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