

The Infection Preventionist Roadmap Series

As we continue with our "IP Tip Sheets" to support the Infection Preventionist (IP) in their central role of leading the Infection Prevention & Control Program, we shift our focus to linen management. This sometimes-overlooked area of infection control can leave a facility vulnerable to an infection source. Having good procedures and policies in place that include infection control protocols is key to a successful linen management program.



A key aspect of the IPC program involves the handling, storing, transporting, and cleaning of laundry items. Laundry includes the resident's personal clothing, linens, towels, washcloths, and any items from other departments. Though infection is rarely traced back to laundry, immunocompromised or high-risk individuals are susceptible. For example, *Clostridium difficile* has the potential for transmission if contaminated linen comes in contact with clean linen or if not laundered properly.

When handling laundry, staff should use standard precautions and consider all used laundry as potentially contaminated. Used laundry should be contained at the point of collection, ideally in leak-resistant containers, especially those contaminated with blood or

body substances. This relates to OSHA's bloodborne pathogen standard CFR 1910.1030 ([Occupational Safety and Health Administration 1910.1030 - Bloodborne pathogens](#)) for handling of potentially infectious material. A facility should have a written exposure control plan to address minimizing or eliminating employee exposure.

In transporting laundry, the key is to prevent cross-contamination. Best practices to follow include avoiding close contact with contaminated linen or laundry bags, separate carts should be used for transporting clean and used linen, and contaminated linen carts must be routinely cleaned and disinfected. Clean linens should be protected from soiling during transporting and should be separated from used laundry by using separated spaces for storage and handling.

Considerations for your laundry room include maintaining and using washing machines and dryers per the manufacture and establishment of a maintenance log. Also, use detergents and additives following laundering directions set by the manufacturer. If your facility has a laundry chute, make sure laundry bags are closed with no loose items. If your facility sends laundry offsite, make sure the laundry service ideally meets Healthcare Laundry Accreditation Council (HLAC) standards ([Healthcare Laundry Accreditation Council Accreditation Standards](#)).

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As you can see, maintaining infection control standards in your linen management involves just a few basic steps but will reduce your risk of infection. Make sure to check out the links below for helpful resources to assist in this process.

Action items:

- Joint Commission Laundry Practices Infection Control Assessment Checklist: [Laundry Checklist31.pdf \(jcrinc.com\)](#)
- CDC Guidelines for Infection Control of Laundry and Bedding: [Laundry | Background | Environmental Guidelines | Guidelines Library | Infection Control | CDC](#)
- McKnights article: [Laundry practices often overlooked in infection control, accreditor says - Clinical Daily News - McKnight's Long-Term Care News \(mcknights.com\)](#)
- Environmental Services Checklist for containment of CDI: [CDI EVS Checklist \(hsag.com\)](#)
- Wisconsin Department of Health Services, LTC Infection Prevention Bootcamp, slides 46-50: [National Healthcare Safety Network \(NHSN\) for New Infection Preventionists \(wisconsin.gov\)](#)
- CDC Nursing Home Infection Preventionist Training (downloadable IPC Risk Assessment spreadsheet) [Infection Prevention Training | LTCF | CDC](#)
- Regularly access the State Operations Manual (SOM) for interpretive guidance on regulations (Appendix PP): [R173SOMA \(cms.gov\)](#)
- Check CMS QSO Memos: <https://www.cms.gov/Medicare/Provider-Enrollment-and-Certification/SurveyCertificationGenInfo/Policy-and-Memos-to-States-and-Regions>
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, or CDC, Infection Control website and Infection Control Guidelines library: [Guidelines Library | Infection Control | CDC](#)
- Scenario-based infection prevention training: [Targeted COVID-19 Training for Nursing Homes](#)
- APIC long-term care resources: [Long-Term Care | infectionpreventionandyou.org](#)

Have questions? Contact Dana Schmitz at dschmitz@hqi.solutions or (314) 391-5538.

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