

INVISIBLE THREATS

Essential Linen & Laundry Practices to Prevent Infections in Healthcare Facilities



Infection prevention is a cornerstone of patient safety in healthcare facilities. While hand hygiene and surface disinfection are widely recognized as critical, the role of linens and laundry in preventing the spread of infections often doesn't receive the attention it deserves. This guide dives deep into best practices for managing linen and laundry, providing actionable steps to help healthcare facilities minimize infection risks and maintain a safe environment.

1 | Understanding Linen-Related Infection Risks

Linens, whether used for bedding, patient gowns, or staff uniforms, can become a source of infection if not handled and processed correctly. Pathogens such as *Candida auris*, and MRSA can survive on fabric surfaces, turning contaminated linens into vehicles for spreading infections within healthcare facilities. Recognizing and mitigating these risks is essential to maintaining a clean and safe environment.

2 | Best Practices for Linen Handling & Storage

Ensure that clean linens are always covered and stored in dedicated, contamination-free areas. The separation between clean and soiled linens is vital, as even minor lapses can lead to cross-contamination. Clean linens should be wrapped until they are ready for patient use.

Soiled linens should be treated with the utmost care. Always enclose them in lidded hampers or secure containment systems to prevent the spread of pathogens. Storage areas for soiled linens must be physically separated from those used for clean linens, with clear instructions in place for handling and transportation.

3 | High Standards in Laundry Processing

Adopting rigorous disinfection protocols, such as Triple Bio Shield Protection®, is crucial. This process not only sanitizes linens but also applies a protective coating that inhibits the spread of bacteria even after the linens are laundered. This level of protection ensures that linens remain safe throughout their use.

Unidirectional airflow in laundry processing facilities is a critical factor in preventing contamination. By ensuring that air flows in one direction—from clean to soiled areas—the risk of cross-contamination is minimized.

The cleanliness of linens must be maintained throughout the entire process, including transportation. Use sanitized carts and trucks, and wrap linens in protective plastic to prevent contamination during transit.

4 | Linen Distribution and Tracking

To maintain high standards of hygiene, it's important to implement a robust tracking system for linens. Such systems can trace the journey of each linen item from the laundry facility to the patient's room, ensuring that cleanliness is maintained at every step. Routine inspections of linen storage and handling practices should be conducted to identify any potential lapses in protocols.

5 | The Importance of Microfiber in Infection Control

Microfiber cleaning tools have been shown to significantly reduce the presence of bacteria. Unlike traditional cotton, which only removes 68% of bacteria, microfiber mops remove up to 95%. By incorporating microfiber mops and towels into your cleaning protocols, particularly in high-touch areas such as bed rails, tray tables, and door handles, you can reduce the risk of hospital-acquired infections (HAIs). Microfiber's superior ability to trap and remove bacteria makes it an important tool in infection prevention.

6 | Addressing Overlooked Areas: Cubicle Curtains

Cubicle curtains, frequently touched but infrequently cleaned, can be a surprising source of contamination in healthcare settings. Studies have shown that a significant percentage of these curtains are contaminated with pathogens like MRSA and VRE. Implementing a consistent cleaning schedule, as recommended by the CDC, is essential. Curtains should be changed immediately after contact with isolated patients or when visibly soiled, and regular documentation of cleaning activities is crucial for compliance.

Key Questions to Ask Your Laundry Provider

Choosing the right laundry provider is critical to ensuring that your linens are processed to the highest standards. Here are key questions to ask:

- Disinfection Protocols: What specific disinfection standards do you follow, and how do they align with CDC guidelines?
- Facility Management: How is the laundry plant's airflow managed to prevent cross-contamination?
- Linen Transportation: What measures are in place to ensure linens remain uncontaminated during transportation?
- Accreditations: What accreditations or certifications does your facility hold that guarantee adherence to industry best practices?

Conclusion

The role of linens in infection prevention cannot be understated. By following the best practices outlined in this guide, healthcare facilities can significantly reduce the risk of infections, ensuring a safer environment for both patients and staff. Partnering with a linen and laundry company such as ImageFIRST ensures the highest standards of cleanliness and disinfection is not just a best practice—it's a necessity for maintaining patient safety.



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ImageFIRST is the largest national linen and laundry service provider specializing in the healthcare industry. As leaders in infection prevention, we currently own and operate the most HLAC-accredited facilities in the industry.