



# Washing clothes at home

**Information for people in  
hospitals or care homes and  
their relatives**

**This leaflet is for anyone who washes their friend's or relative's clothing whilst they are receiving care in a hospital or care home.**

### **Is there a risk of infection if I take clothing home from a hospital or care home?**

The risk of infection to you and your family is very low, but the information in this leaflet will help you handle the clothes safely.

### **Who should I ask if I need extra advice on how to wash the clothes at home?**

The staff in the ward or care home will tell you the main things you need to do, such as washing your hands or wearing gloves, before you take any items home.

### **How will I carry the clothing home?**

Staff will put the clothing in a plastic bag which they will tie securely to stop anything leaking. You should not be able to see what is in the bag from the outside, but you may want to bring another bag to put the clothing inside. If you do this, make sure there are no other items in the bag, for example food.

### **What if my friend or relative has an infection and I have been given their clothing to take home?**

In this situation staff may give you extra advice, for example they might tell you to use a higher washing temperature than you would normally.

## **Is there ever a situation when I should not take clothing home?**

In very rare circumstances, such as the clothing being very dirty or soiled, staff may recommend that you use the laundry service in the hospital or care home, if this is available.

## **How should I handle clothing I take home?**

**Step 1** – Take the items home in the tied plastic bag that the staff have provided.

- Wash the clothing as soon as possible.
- Try not to rinse dirty clothes by hand, but if you need to you should wear rubber gloves. Rinse the items by placing them completely underwater to avoid splashing and spreading germs onto the nearby area (for example worktops).
- If you have to use a plastic container to wash the items, take care when you pour the used water down the drain.
- Clean the sink afterwards with your usual kitchen cleaner. You should then wash the clothing using the steps in this leaflet.
- The clothing may have been put in a special laundry bag which has a dissolvable strip and can be put directly into the washing machine. There are special washing instructions for this situation and staff will explain this to you.

## **Step 2 – Putting the items into the washing machine**

- Wash the clothing separately from your other home laundry.

### **Items in laundry bag with dissolvable strip.**

- If the items have been placed in a laundry bag with a dissolvable strip, put the bag directly into the washing machine.
- The bag's soluble tape and seam will dissolve during the washing cycle. For this to happen the hotter the temperature the better, however the water-soluble bag will open automatically at any temperature.
- At the end of the washing cycle remove the bag and put it in your usual household bin.

### **Normal laundry**

- Remove the items from the bag and put them directly into the washing machine, if possible without sorting them. If you have to sort the clothes wear rubber gloves and wash these and your hands with soap and warm water afterwards.
- Check the washing instructions on the labels in the clothing carefully.
- Always hold the clothing away from you to avoid spreading germs onto your clothes.
- Do not shake the clothing as this may cause germs to spread.
- Do not overload your washing machine as this will not wash the clothes as well.



## **After putting the laundry into the washing machine**

- Put the plastic bag you used to carry the clothing home into your usual household bin.
- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and warm water.
- Clean the area around your washing machine such as the door of the machine and worktops with your usual kitchen cleaner.

### **Step 3 – Wash the clothing using the highest temperature you can and following the washing instructions.**

- Use your normal washing powder or detergent and follow the instructions on the correct amount to use.

### **Step 4 – Tumble-dry the clothes (if possible) following the washing instructions.**

- If you cannot tumble-dry the items, dry them in the way you would normally, for example on a washing line or clothes horse.

### **Step 5 – Iron clothes according to care label. If possible, use a hot steam iron.**

### **Step 6 – Store items in a clean and dry place until they are ready to be used again.**

- This includes when you are taking the clothes back to a hospital or care home. Always carry clean clothes in a clean bag.

## Top tips

- Always wash your hands with soap and warm water after handling dirty clothing, and before handling clean clothing.
- Make sure that your washing machine and tumble drier are working well, for example remove fluff from the tumble drier filter and use the correct amount of washing powder or detergent.

**If you need any more information, please ask the staff at the ward or care home for help.**

### Staff contact details:

National Infection Prevention and Control Manual [www.nipcm.hps.scot.nhs.uk/](http://www.nipcm.hps.scot.nhs.uk/)  
Please phone **0141 300 1175** for more information.

This publication can be made available in large print, Braille (English only), audio tape and different languages. Please contact [nss.equalitydiversity@nhs.scot](mailto:nss.equalitydiversity@nhs.scot) for further information.

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