

LINEN AND LAUNDRY HANDLING AND PROCESSING

Early Childhood Education and Care Services

DOCUMENT INFORMATION

Title	Linen and Laundry Handling and Processing
Reference	SSOW-IC-009
Version	1.0
Author	ECEC Workforce Solutions
Date	2 August 2026
Review Date	2 August 2027

Service Name
License Number
Approved By
WHS Officer Review

Table of Contents

01	02
Purpose and Scope	Task Description
03	04
Hazard Identification	Risk Assessment (Before Controls)
05	06
Control Selection — Hierarchy of Controls	Residual Risk Assessment (After Controls)
07	08
Backup and Emergency Procedures	Training and Competency
09	10
Approved Products	References and Legislation

 This document is a controlled record. Any printed copy is uncontrolled. Always refer to the current version held by the Nominated Supervisor.

SECTION 1

1. PURPOSE AND SCOPE

This Safe System of Work (SSOW) applies to all workers who handle, transport, sort, wash, dry, fold, and store linen, bedding, towels, and soft textiles in early childhood education and care (ECEC) services. It covers every stage of the linen lifecycle – from collection at point of use through to clean storage – and applies to all staff involved in laundry operations, including educators, support staff, and any contracted laundry personnel.

This SSOW covers the following items:

Bedding

Cot sheets, blankets, nap mats, and pillowcases

Personal Textiles

Towels, face cloths, and dress-up clothing

Soft Furnishings

Soft toys, cushion covers, and tablecloths

Transport Items

Laundry transport bags and soiled linen receptacles



Linen is a critical infection control point. Soiled, damp, or improperly handled textiles can transmit pathogens including gastrointestinal viruses, skin infections, and respiratory illness directly to children and staff.

This SSOW governs all linen handling that precedes, supports, or follows zone-specific cleaning tasks. It must be read in conjunction with **SSOW-IC-004** (Bathroom and Nappy Change Area Cleaning), **SSOW-IC-003** (Sleep Room Cleaning and Cot Sanitation), and the service's **Biohazard Spill and Contaminated Linen Protocols**. Any linen contaminated with blood, vomit, faeces, or other bodily fluids must be managed under the biohazard procedures defined in those documents before entering the standard laundry process.

This SSOW is designed to be used alongside the service's chemicals register, all relevant Safety Data Sheets (SDS) for laundry detergents and sanitisers, and Infection Control Module 3 training materials.

2. TASK DESCRIPTION

This Safe System of Work covers the following linen and laundry handling tasks.

1 Collection of Used Linen

Used linen is collected from rooms, cots, bathrooms, and play areas as part of the scheduled linen changeover or in response to soiling or contamination events.

2 Bagging and Sealing at Point of Use

Used linen must be placed directly into a designated laundry bag at the point of use without shaking or handling unnecessarily, then sealed securely before transport.

3 Transport via Designated Route

Bagged linen must be transported to the laundry area via the designated route, keeping used linen separated from clean linen and food preparation areas at all times.

4 Loading Washing Machines with Correct Settings

Linen must be loaded into washing machines at the correct load capacity and washed using the temperature and cycle settings specified for the linen type and contamination level.

5 Transfer to Dryers or Drying Lines

After washing, linen must be transferred promptly to dryers or approved outdoor drying lines to prevent microbial growth from damp conditions and to ensure thorough drying.

6 Folding, Sorting, and Storage in Clean Storage

Clean, dry linen must be folded and sorted by type and then stored in the designated clean linen storage area, protected from dust, moisture, and contact with used linen.

7 Cleaning and Disinfecting Laundry Equipment

Laundry bags, baskets, and transport equipment must be cleaned and disinfected after each use in accordance with the service's cleaning schedule and relevant SDS instructions.

8 Recordkeeping of Wash Cycles, Temperatures, and Inventory

Each laundry cycle must be recorded in the laundry log, including the date, wash temperature, cycle type, items washed, and the name of the worker who completed the task.

3. HAZARD IDENTIFICATION

The following hazards have been identified for this task.

Exposure to Bodily Fluids and Infectious Pathogens on Soiled Linen

Handling soiled linen contaminated with blood, faeces, urine, vomit, or other bodily fluids presents a direct risk of exposure to infectious pathogens including bacteria, viruses, and parasites. Contact with contaminated linen without appropriate PPE can result in infection transmission to staff.

Aerosolisation of Pathogens from Shaking, Sorting, and Agitating Soiled Linen

Shaking, flicking, sorting, or vigorously handling soiled linen can aerosolise infectious particles and biological debris into the surrounding air. Airborne pathogens can be inhaled or settle on nearby surfaces, significantly extending the contamination zone beyond the immediate handling area.

Cross-Contamination Between Clean and Soiled Linen

Failure to maintain strict physical and procedural separation between soiled and clean linen creates a direct cross-contamination pathway. Contact between used and laundered items, shared trolleys, or storage in proximity renders clean linen microbiologically unsafe for use with children or vulnerable individuals.

Chemical Exposure and Contact Dermatitis from Laundry Products

Laundry detergents, fabric softeners, disinfectant additives, and bleach-based products contain irritants and sensitisers that can cause contact dermatitis, skin dryness, chemical burns, and respiratory irritation. Repeated or prolonged skin contact without gloves increases the risk of occupational skin disease.

Thermal Burns and Scalding from Hot Water, Machines, and Steam

Industrial washing machines, dryers, steam presses, and hot water outlets operate at temperatures capable of causing serious thermal burns and scalding injuries. Risk is heightened when removing items from hot machines, handling steam-generating equipment, or accessing hot water supplies without adequate protective equipment.

Musculoskeletal Injury from Lifting, Carrying, and Moving Heavy Laundry

Full laundry bags, wet linen, and bulk loads can be extremely heavy and awkward to handle. Repeated or incorrect manual handling without proper technique, mechanical aids, or load management increases the risk of back injury, muscle strain, joint damage, and cumulative musculoskeletal disorders.

Slip and Trip Hazards from Wet Floors, Dropped Linen, and Leaking Bags

Laundry areas frequently involve wet floors, spillage from leaking or overfilled bags, and dropped items creating trip hazards. Wet linen on floors and uncontained biohazard fluid leaks from soiled bags pose simultaneous slip and infection risks to staff working in or passing through the laundry zone.

Infection Pathway from Role Switching and Breach of Educator-to-Child Ratios

Staff who move between soiled linen handling and direct child care roles without completing full PPE removal, hand hygiene, and role transition protocols create infection pathways into child-facing environments. Additionally, removing educators from ratio to manage laundry tasks may breach minimum educator-to-child supervision ratios, creating a concurrent safety and regulatory compliance risk.

⚠️ Aerosolisation of pathogens from soiled linen handling and infection pathways from role switching represent the highest-risk failure modes. Soiled linen must never be shaken or sorted without full PPE, and role transitions must always be completed before re-entering child care environments.

4. RISK ASSESSMENT (BEFORE CONTROLS)

The following risk assessment identifies hazards associated with linen and laundry handling prior to the implementation of control measures.

Hazard	Who is at Risk	Risk Before Controls
Cross-contamination from soiled linen and inadequate segregation	Laundry staff, children, care staff	High
Infection transmission via handling of heavily soiled or infectious linen	Laundry staff, care staff	High
Inadequate disinfection due to incorrect wash temperature or cycle	Children, staff, visitors	High
Chemical exposure from laundry detergents and disinfectants	Laundry staff	Medium
Musculoskeletal injury from manual handling of heavy linen bags	Laundry staff, care staff	Medium
Microbial growth on damp or improperly dried and stored linen	Children, staff	Medium
Sharps or foreign object injuries concealed within soiled linen	Laundry staff	Medium
Improper disposal or bagging of infectious or single-use linen items	Laundry staff, cleaning staff	Medium



Hazards rated **High** prior to controls require immediate mitigation measures and must not be deferred. Risk ratings are to be reviewed following any incident or change in procedure.

5. CONTROL SELECTION — HIERARCHY OF CONTROLS

For each identified hazard associated with linen and laundry handling, controls are selected starting from the highest level of the hierarchy (Elimination) and working down to the lowest (PPE). PPE is never used as a substitute for higher-order controls.

- The hierarchy of controls is applied in descending order: **Elimination** → **Substitution** → **Engineering** → **Administrative** → **PPE**. Higher-order controls are always preferred and implemented first.

Hazard 1 — Cross-Contamination from Soiled Linen and Inadequate Segregation

- ⚠ **NEVER shake soiled linen in an occupied room.** Shaking disperses pathogens into the air and onto surfaces, creating an immediate infection risk to children, staff, and visitors.

Elimination - Remove soiled linen from use immediately upon discovery. No soiled item is re-used or left in a room unbagged. - Eliminate the handling of unbagged soiled linen by placing a waterproof bag at point of use before stripping linen.	Substitution - Substitute open linen trolleys with lidded, colour-coded linen carts to prevent airborne contamination during transport. - Use alginate (water-soluble) bags as the primary inner bag for infectious linen, eliminating the need to handle contaminated items when loading washers.	Engineering - Designated soiled linen holding area, physically separated from clean linen storage and food preparation areas. - Hands-free or foot-pedal lidded linen bins in all rooms for immediate containment. - Separate trolleys — red for soiled, white/green for clean — stored in different locations.
		Administrative - Soiled linen bagged at point of removal — never carried through common areas unbagged. - Clean linen never transported on the same trolley as soiled linen simultaneously. - Linen segregation training delivered to all staff at induction and annually thereafter. - Segregation procedure posted in laundry area and linen storage rooms.
		PPE (Last Line of Defence) Disposable apron and gloves when handling soiled or infectious linen.

Hazard 2 — Infection Transmission via Handling of Infectious Linen

- ⚠ **Infectious linen (contaminated with blood, vomit, faeces, or body fluids) must be treated as a biohazard.** Handle with full PPE and process separately from standard laundry.

Elimination - Use single-use, disposable bed protection pads and incontinence covers for children with known infection risk, eliminating the need to launder heavily contaminated linen. - Discard single-use items immediately in clinical waste bag — do not attempt to launder.	Substitution - Substitute standard cotton linen with antimicrobial-treated or impermeable covers for high-risk areas (nappy changing, medical care beds). - Use alginate inner bags that dissolve in the washing machine drum, eliminating direct contact with infectious contents at the laundry stage.	Engineering - Dedicated wash cycle for infectious linen — separate from standard laundry load. - Washing machines with a sluice or pre-rinse function for heavily soiled items. - Enclosed transport bags and carts to prevent leakage during transit to laundry.
		Administrative - Infectious linen identified, bagged, and labelled at point of removal before transport. - Laundry staff informed of infectious status before handling. - Infectious linen processed first in shift on a dedicated wash cycle, drum cleaned after. - Incident recording for any exposure to infectious linen during handling.
		PPE (Last Line of Defence) - Full PPE: disposable gloves, apron, and surgical mask when handling infectious linen. - Eye protection if risk of splashing during removal or bagging.

Hazard 3 — Inadequate Disinfection Due to Incorrect Wash Temperature or Cycle

Elimination - Where items cannot be safely washed at the required temperature, eliminate their use in favour of single-use alternatives. - Remove from service any items that are not compatible with thermal disinfection washing cycles.	Substitution - Substitute delicate or low-temperature linen items with thermally compatible alternatives that can be safely washed at 60°C or above. - Use laundry disinfectant additives approved for lower-temperature washes where thermal disinfection is not achievable for certain fabrics.	Engineering - Commercial washing machines with validated thermal disinfection cycles (minimum 60°C for 10 minutes). - Machine temperature monitoring — machines with automatic cycle verification where available. - Separate machines or dedicated cycles for standard and infectious linen loads.
		Administrative - All linen washed at a minimum of 60°C. Infectious linen washed at 65°C or above for a minimum of 10 minutes. - Cycle selection verified before each load — staff must not override temperature settings. - Laundry log maintained recording load type, temperature, and cycle used for each wash. - Machines serviced and calibrated regularly to ensure temperature accuracy. - Supervisor spot-checks on cycle selection and load categorisation.
		PPE (Last Line of Defence) Heat-resistant gloves when unloading from dryers or handling hot linen.

Hazard 4 — Chemical Exposure from Laundry Detergents and Disinfectants

Elimination - Use pre-measured, encapsulated detergent pods or tablets to eliminate exposure to loose powders and liquid concentrates. - Remove any unlabelled, deteriorated, or unidentified chemical containers from the laundry area immediately.	Substitution - Substitute caustic or high-irritant detergents with low-irritant, fragrance-free, pH-balanced alternatives that still meet disinfection requirements. - Use closed-system dispensing or automatic dosing systems to eliminate manual pouring of concentrates.	Engineering - Ventilated laundry room with adequate airflow to disperse chemical vapours. - Chemical storage on dedicated shelving with spill containment trays beneath. - Automatic dosing systems plumbed into washing machines where available. - Eyewash station accessible within or immediately adjacent to the laundry area.
		Administrative - Safety Data Sheets (SDS) accessible at the laundry station for all chemicals in use. - Labels intact and legible on all containers — never use unlabelled bottles. - Staff trained on safe chemical handling, dilution, and emergency spill response before first use. - Chemicals stored separately from food, linen, and personal items. - Accidental exposure reported and first aid applied per SDS instructions immediately.
		PPE (Last Line of Defence)

6. RESIDUAL RISK ASSESSMENT (AFTER CONTROLS)

Following implementation of all selected controls, the residual risk level for each identified hazard in linen and laundry handling has been assessed. All hazards have been reduced to **Low** risk. Ongoing verification is required to ensure controls remain effective.

Hazard	Residual Risk	Verification Method
1. Cross-contamination from soiled linen contact	Low	Colour-coded bag use verified for soiled vs. clean linen separation. PPE compliance observed at point of collection. Weekly supervisor audit of linen handling procedures completed and signed.
2. Microbial survival from inadequate laundering temperatures	Low	Wash cycle temperature log maintained and confirmed at 60°C+ for all standard linen. Thermally disinfected cycle records retained. No odour or visible soiling on clean linen observed post-wash.
3. Exposure to biohazardous or body-fluid-contaminated linen	Low	Biohazard linen bagged at point of generation and confirmed segregated. Disposable PPE use verified during handling. Biohazard linen disposal or decontamination log completed and signed by supervisor.
4. Chemical exposure from laundry detergents and disinfectants	Low	All detergents and disinfectants confirmed labelled and SDS accessible at laundry station. PPE (gloves, eye protection) compliance checked during chemical handling tasks. No unlabelled or decanted chemical containers found in active use.
5. Musculoskeletal injury from manual handling of linen loads	Low	Linen trolleys and ergonomic handling aids confirmed in use and serviceable. Manual handling technique observed during induction and periodic spot checks. No musculoskeletal injury reports related to linen handling in current period.
6. Re-contamination of clean linen during storage or transport	Low	Physical separation of clean and soiled linen storage areas verified. Clean linen stored covered and off the floor confirmed during weekly inspection. No co-mingling of clean and soiled linen trolleys observed.
7. Slips, trips, and falls in laundry areas from wet floors or linen on the floor	Low	Wet floor signage deployed in laundry area during and after washing operations. Non-slip footwear compliance confirmed at shift start. Incident log reviewed – no slip or trip events recorded in current period.
8. Incorrect identification or return of linen to wrong area or resident	Low	Linen labelling and tracking system verified in use for resident-specific items. Returned linen checked against room allocation records before distribution. Supervisor sign-off on linen distribution checklist completed each shift.

 All residual risk ratings are conditional on full and consistent implementation of the controls specified in Section 5. Failure to maintain any control measure may elevate the risk rating and must be reported immediately to the supervising manager.

 Verification records, audit logs, and inspection checklists must be retained for a minimum of 12 months and made available upon request for regulatory review.

7. BACKUP AND EMERGENCY PROCEDURES — LINEN AND LAUNDRY HANDLING

The following emergency procedures must be followed immediately in the event of a contamination incident involving linen or laundry. All staff must be familiar with these procedures prior to commencing any linen or laundry handling duties.

7.1 Gastroenteritis or Vomiting Incident on Bedding

In the event of a vomiting or gastroenteritis incident involving bedding, cots, or soft furnishings, staff must act immediately to contain contamination and prevent the spread of infection.

Step 1 — Don Full PPE

Before touching any contaminated linen, put on **disposable gloves, apron, and eye protection**. Do not handle soiled items with bare hands under any circumstances.

Step 2 — Remove Linen Carefully

Remove soiled linen by rolling inward to contain the contamination. Avoid shaking or flicking the fabric, as this can aerosolise viral particles. Place directly into a **red biohazard bag**.

Step 3 — Contain Solid Matter

Using a disposable scraper or paper towel, remove any solid matter from the surface before laundering. Dispose of scraper and paper waste into the sealed biohazard bag immediately.

Step 4 — Disinfect the Surface

Treat the affected mattress or surface with an appropriate **TGA-registered disinfectant** effective against norovirus and gastroenteritis pathogens. Allow full contact time as per the product SDS before wiping.

Step 5 — Launder at Outbreak Temperature

Wash contaminated linen at a minimum of **90°C** during any confirmed or suspected gastroenteritis outbreak. Use a commercial-grade detergent and complete a full wash cycle with no reduction in temperature.

Step 6 — Report and Record

Report the incident to the supervising manager immediately. Complete an infection control incident report and record the event in the linen contamination log. Notify parents and relevant authorities as required.

 **Outbreak Protocol:** During any confirmed gastroenteritis outbreak, the minimum laundry temperature is **90°C**. Standard routine washing at 60°C is **not sufficient** during outbreak conditions. The Nominated Supervisor must authorise the outbreak temperature setting and document the change in the laundry log.

7.2 Blood or Body Fluid Exposure on Linen

Any linen or laundry item visibly contaminated with blood or body fluids must be treated as a **biohazard**. Standard handling procedures do not apply. Follow the biohazard protocol below without exception.

1

Isolate Immediately

Remove the contaminated item from circulation without delay. Do not place near clean linen, communal laundry baskets, or shared areas. Keep isolated until processed.

2

Don Biohazard PPE

Wear **double-gloved** hands, disposable apron, eye protection, and a fluid-resistant mask before handling. PPE must be removed and disposed of safely after handling.

3

Bag and Label

Place the item in a **red biohazard bag**, sealed securely. Label the bag with the date, item description, and room of origin. Do not place biohazard linen in standard laundry bags.

4

Wash at 90°C Minimum

Launder the item separately at a minimum of **90°C** with a commercial disinfectant-grade detergent. Do not combine with routine laundry. Confirm temperature reached on the laundry record log.

 **Sharps or Unknown Contamination:** If any linen is suspected of containing sharps (needles, glass, etc.) or the source of contamination is unknown, **do not handle the item**. Isolate the area and contact the supervising manager immediately. Treat as a sharps incident and follow the facility's sharps management protocol.

Routine Washing

Minimum temperature: **60°C**
Used for all standard linen and laundry during normal operations with no confirmed contamination or outbreak conditions.

Biohazard / Blood Exposure

Minimum temperature: **90°C**
Mandatory for all linen contaminated with blood, body fluids, or biohazardous matter. Separate wash cycle required.

Gastroenteritis Outbreak

Minimum temperature: **90°C**
Required for ALL linen during a confirmed or suspected gastroenteritis outbreak, regardless of visible contamination status.

7.3 No Dedicated Cleaner On-Site

When a dedicated cleaner is not present, specific ratio verification requirements must be met before any linen or laundry handling task is assigned to an educator. Biohazard laundry tasks may not be assigned to educators unless an immediate safety risk exists.

1

Verify Ratios

The Nominated Supervisor must confirm that child-to-educator ratios are fully maintained across all rooms before any educator is redirected to a linen or laundry task.

2

Confirm Competency

The educator assigned must have completed linen handling and infection control induction training, and be familiar with the relevant SDS and PPE requirements for the specific task.

3

Assign Supervision Cover

A second staff member must confirm they are covering the room during the educator's absence. Written acknowledgement is required in the supervision log before the educator is redirected.

4

Limit Task Scope

Educators must only perform **low-risk, routine linen tasks** (e.g., placing clean linen on cots). Biohazard linen handling and outbreak laundry protocols must be deferred until qualified cleaning staff are present, unless an immediate safety risk exists.

5

Notify Management

The absence of a dedicated cleaner must be reported to management immediately. A replacement or contractor must be arranged as a priority if linen and laundry needs cannot be safely met by available staff.

 **Compliance Requirement:** Ratios must never be compromised to perform linen or laundry duties. The Nominated Supervisor is personally responsible for verifying and documenting ratio coverage before any educator is redirected. Non-compliance must be reported to the Approved Provider immediately.

Section 10: REFERENCES AND LEGISLATION

- Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (NSW) / WHS Regulations 2017
- WHS Regulation 36. Hierarchy of Control
- Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010 (National Law)
- Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011 (Regulation 113, 168)
- National Quality Standard (NQS). Quality Area 2. Children's Health and Safety
- Staying Healthy in Child Care (NHMRC). 5th Edition
- AS/NZS 4146. Laundry Practice (where applicable to commercial operations)
- NCCS Framework v2.1

DOCUMENT CONTROL

This SSOW must be reviewed under the following conditions:

- Every 12 months
- After any incident, near-miss, or regulatory visit
- When any new laundry product, equipment, or procedure is introduced
- When legislation or guidance changes

DISTRIBUTION

All staff, cleaning contractors, and relief educators. Digital copy maintained in the service's WHS register and cleaning management system.

RELATED DOCUMENTS

- SSOW-IC-001. Toilet and Children's Bathroom Cleaning and Disinfection
- SSOW-IC-002. High-Touch Surface Cleaning and Disinfection
- SSOW-IC-003. Toy Cleaning and Sanitisation
- SSOW-IC-004. Sleep Surface Sanitisation
- SSOW-IC-005. Kitchen and Food-Prep Surface Cleaning and Sanitisation
- SSOW-IC-006. Floor Cleaning and Sanitisation
- SSOW-IC-007. Cleaning Equipment Hygiene and Maintenance
- SSOW-IC-008. Chemical Mixing, Diluting, and Decanting
- NCCS Framework v2.1
- Infection Control Module 3. Cleaning and Biohazard Management

Section 9: APPROVED PRODUCTS

The following table lists all approved laundry products for use in this service. Only products listed below may be used. Any new laundry product must be approved by the Nominated Supervisor and WHS Officer before introduction.

Product	Use	Dose / Dilution	Wash Temperature	Cycle	SDS Location
[Insert laundry detergent]	Routine washing	[Insert per label]	60 degrees Celsius	Normal or heavy-duty	[Insert]
[Insert laundry sanitiser]	Outbreak or high-risk loads	[Insert per label]	60 degrees Celsius or per label	Sanitise cycle	[Insert]
[Insert stain remover]	Pre-treatment	[Insert per label]	N/A	Spot treatment only	[Insert]
[Insert laundry bags - colour-coded]	Soiled linen transport	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

 **Note:** Washing at 60 degrees Celsius is the minimum thermal threshold for routine elimination of most enteric and respiratory pathogens. During declared outbreaks, increase to 90 degrees Celsius or add an approved laundry sanitiser per the outbreak protocol.

TRAINING AND COMPETENCY

This SSOW must be read and understood before any worker performs this task unsupervised. All workers must complete the following items:

- ☐ Infection Control Module 3 (laundry and linen handling)
- ☐ Biohazard awareness and bodily fluid exposure response
- ☐ Correct bagging and sealing technique at the point of use
- ☐ No-shaking policy and aerosol hazard awareness
- ☐ Correct washing machine operation (temperature, cycle, detergent dosing)
- ☐ Cross-contamination prevention and clean/soiled separation
- ☐ Chemical safety for laundry products
- ☐ Thermal burn prevention
- ☐ Safe lifting and manual handling
- ☐ PPE donning and doffing
- ☐ Supervisor sign-off on competency register

Refresher training occurs every 12 months, or earlier if incident or audit indicates skill degradation.