Washing soiled clothes and linens: Overview

Keeping clothes and bed linens clean can take time, but it's worth the effort. It can help the person you're caring for stay healthy and feel clean. Clothes and bed linens become soiled when they come into contact with things like urine, stool, or vomit. Washing soiled clothes and linens right away can help reduce the chance of infection from germs.

Soiled clothes and linens can spread germs, so be sure to handle them with care and wear gloves. Hold them away from you, and keep them from touching clean surfaces or other clean linens.

If you can't wash dirty clothes or linens right away, store them in a container with a lid and wash them as soon as you can.

How do you wash soiled clothes and linens?

You can clean clothes and linens in a washing machine, using laundry detergent. Always wear disposable gloves when handling soiled clothes or linens. And always wash them separately from other items.

1. Using disposable gloves, wipe off any stool with paper towels. Put the used paper towels in a plastic trash bag. Small amounts of easily removed stool can be removed with toilet paper and flushed down the toilet.
2. Put the soiled linens in a large plastic bag. The bag should prevent moisture from leaking through. Take the bag to the washing machine.
3. Put the linens in the washing machine. Wash items in a prewash cycle first. Then use a regular wash cycle with detergent. Use the warmest temperature recommended on the labels.
4. Take off your gloves and wash your hands right away after you handle the soiled clothes or linens.
5. Dry clothes and linens in a clothes dryer. Use the warmest temperature recommended on the labels.

For 24/7 nurse advice and general health information call Health Link at 811.