



# Guidance Document on Laundries and Launderettes and Risk Reduction of COVID 19 Transmission

## Scope of this Document

Hygiene is a key component in the slowing of spread of COVID-19. Clean, hygienic clothes and linens are instrumental in helping reduce the spread of this virus. In this regard, commercial washer-dryers provide exceptional mechanical action, which, when combined with hot water and detergent, deliver outstanding hygienic results – on-par with hospital-grade machines. It should also be noted that additional laundry processes (drying & ironing) further reduce viruses and bacteria.

In addition, in general, commercial tumble dryers achieve higher temperatures than home laundry units and this high heat drying decreases further the chances of viability of COVID 19 virus. The risk of disease transmission is very low if basic hygiene and common-sense storage and handling of soiled and cleaned linen is practiced. This document aims to provide guidelines that enable the laundry business to continue to provide a valuable service to customers, whilst also keeping them and laundry employees safe.

- ✓ The document will provide recommendations as applicable to the following distinct settings:
  1. Commercial laundries and large hotel / hospitality laundries.
  2. Small launderettes including coin/card laundries
- ✓ Laundry systems related to hospital and healthcare establishments fall outside the scope of this document.
- ✓ These guidelines are not intended to replace any mandatory national and international standards and norms that are in place.

## Mandatory Conditions for Laundries and Launderettes

Laundries and launderettes shall implement the following measures:

- ✓ Exercise the right of refusal of entry into the laundry/launderette of staff / visitors if they are visibly unwell or have respiratory symptoms;
- ✓ Users / staff will be checked with non-contact infra-red thermometers at the door. Users with a temperature above 37.2 °C will not be allowed in
- ✓ Ensure that inside the laundry/launderette every person keeps a minimum distance of 2 metres from others;



- ✓ Ensure that maximum capacity of staff / visitors that the laundry/laundrette can hold at any one time inside the building is one person per 4 square metres, including staff;
- ✓ Affix visible signage at the entrance of the laundry/laundrette indicating the maximum capacity that the premises can hold at any one time;
- ✓ Acrylic or tempered glass barriers must be fitted in reception areas (at 2 metres height from the floor). If this is not manned, then this is not required;
- ✓ Indicate with visible markings outside and inside the laundry/laundrette two (2) metre distances that visitors shall respect whilst queuing.
- ✓ Hand sanitizers must be made available at the entrance of the laundry/laundrette and ensure that all persons sanitise their hands prior to entrance. Sanitizers should also be available in other strategic places (sanitizers with sensors are recommended);
- ✓ Users / staff will be asked to sanitize their hands on entering and upon leaving premises
- ✓ Users / staff who refuse this procedure will not be allowed in
- ✓ Ensure that visitors and staff always wear a face mask (covering mouth, nose and chin) or face visor whilst inside the laundry/laundrette.
- ✓ The general public shall be informed about all restrictions on the laundry/laundrette's website and at the entrance.

## Background

### How COVID-19 spreads

The virus which causes COVID-19 disease can be spread through droplets from a sick person or on contact (by touch). COVID-19 disease often presents with coughing or sneezing which release droplets of infected fluid. Cases may present with other symptoms or none at all. Most of these droplets can fall on nearby surfaces and objects - such as desks, tables, machinery, equipment, floors, walls clothes or telephones. People can catch COVID-19 by touching contaminated surfaces or objects – and then touching their eyes, nose or mouth. Being within a distance of less than two metres of a person with COVID-19, one has a higher risk of catching the disease by breathing in droplets coughed out or exhaled by them.

In other words, COVID-19 spreads in a similar way to flu. The most common symptoms of coronavirus include cough, fever, shortness of breath, tiredness, sore throat, runny / blocked nose, headache, muscle pain, loss of smell, loss of taste, diarrhoea or vomiting. Most persons infected with COVID-19 experience mild symptoms and recover. However, some go on to experience more serious illness and may require hospital care. Risk of serious illness rises with age. People with weakened immune systems and people with conditions such as diabetes, heart and lung disease are also more vulnerable to serious illness.



Persons who develop these symptoms, are to stay at home, contact their doctor and contact the Public Health team on (+356) 111 for further advice and guidance. For more information, seek guidance on [www.covid19health.gov.mt](http://www.covid19health.gov.mt)

## General Guidelines applicable to all laundries/laundrettes

Doing laundry safely might seem daunting especially for people who rely on shared laundry facilities. Washing of hands and wiping down of machine controls with a disinfectant both before and after using laundry machines is recommended when using shared laundry spaces. It is recommended that the hottest possible water setting should be used.

Laundry/laundrette management shall:

- ✓ Ensure that all laundry rooms and common areas are maintained within the appropriate standards for hygiene and social distancing.
- ✓ The site shall have social distancing signage.
- ✓ User timed slots are advisable.
- ✓ Ensure that there is a regular cleaning schedule especially cleaning of frequently touched surfaces with regular household cleaners or disinfectants. Stainless steel can withstand normal household cleaners better.
- ✓ Use the hottest possible water setting – it is recommended to wash items at a temperature of at least 60°C.
- ✓ Check that water heaters are working properly.
- ✓ Make sure users are aware of the hot water temperature.
- ✓ Users are not to use the laundry if they are feeling unwell.
- ✓ Users are to use paper towels or cleaning wipes when using laundry machines.
- ✓ The laundry room door shall remain open during standard operating times.
- ✓ Users must wash their hands and use the hand sanitizer provided before and after using the facilities.
- ✓ Pick up services are to be encouraged (Wash, dry and fold services) as these will avoid crowds within laundries/laundrettes.

Other recommendations include:

- ✓ Fully drying items at highest temperature possible.
- ✓ Disinfecting baskets / containers before re-filling with clean laundry.
- ✓ Taking clean laundry home to fold rather than folding it onsite
- ✓ Closing dryer doors when not in use.
- ✓ Not shaking or hugging dirty laundry.
- ✓ Not leaving soiled laundry or baskets on top of machines.
- ✓ Not leaving cleaning product residue in machines.
- ✓ Limiting the number of people in the laundry room to ensure physical distancing.



## Large commercial laundries and large hotel/hospitality laundries

### General Principles

- ✓ Thermal or chemical-thermal laundering processes, such as those validated by laundry certifications, may be adequate to inactivate lipid enveloped viruses such as the COVID-19 virus in textiles
- ✓ Under normal circumstances, linen should be placed and collected in an appropriate laundry receptacle, laundry bag or alginate laundry bag.
- ✓ Linen used for a quarantined person or a person suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19 infection should be placed in an alginate bag and then into an appropriate laundry receptacle.
  - Avoid sorting linen at the point of generation. Place contaminated linen directly into a laundry bag or laundry receptacle in the isolation room or area with minimal manipulation or agitation, to avoid contamination of air, surfaces and people.
  - A long-sleeved fluid-resistant gown and disposable gloves should be worn during handling of soiled linen to prevent skin and mucous membrane exposure to blood and body substances. The long-sleeved gown and disposable gloves should be removed and hand hygiene performed following the handling of used linen.
  - Wash and dry linen according to routine standards and procedures of the laundry. For hot-water laundry cycles, wash with detergent or disinfectant in water at 70°C (160°F) for at least 25 minutes. If low-temperature (i.e. < 70°C; < 160°F) laundry cycles are used, choose a chemical that is suitable for low-temperature washing when used at the proper concentration
  - In such cases, garments are first cleaned with a neutral detergent and then a chlorine based disinfectant should be used in the form of a solution at a minimum strength of 1,000 parts per million of available chlorine.
  - Contain the used equipment and soiled linen and waste in a manner that prevents the containers or bags from opening or bursting during transport.
  - One layer of packing is adequate, provided that the used equipment and soiled linen and waste can be placed in the bag without contaminating the outside of the bag. Double-bagging is unnecessary.
  - Ensure that all personnel handling the soiled linen use Standard Precautions, and perform hand hygiene after removing PPE. Heavy-duty tasks (e.g. cleaning of the environment) require more resistant PPE (e.g. rubber gloves and apron, and resistant closed shoes).
- ✓ Where applicable, stagger pick-up/drop off times to reduce large groups of customers arriving at the same time as much as possible.



## HOSPITALITY SITES/HOTELS OPERATING AN ON-PREMISES LAUNDRY

- ✓ If a hotel operates an on-premises laundry, management should ensure its wash program is adequately equipped with temperature validation to process infected linen.
- ✓ Routine processes for laundry management of linen apply irrespective of source.

There are no additional controls required for laundry management for linen used for patients with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 infection. Laundry workers should wear the personal protective equipment that is normally used as appropriate to the task being undertaken. For example, laundry workers at the sorting station should normally wear personal protective equipment such as gowns and gloves.

- ✓ All linen used for a person suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19 infection should be managed as for heavily soiled linen. After cleaning with neutral detergent, a chlorine-based disinfectant should be used, in the form of a solution at a minimum strength of 1,000 ppm available chlorine.”

## Laundromats and Launderettes

The following are additional obligatory conditions and good practice guidelines for laundromats/launderettes:

- ✓ Ensure that maximum capacity of visitors inside the laundry/launderette at any one time is one person per 4 square metres, including staff. To achieve this 4 square metre ‘rule’;
  - calculate the area of the site (e.g. length of site in metres x width of laundry/launderette in metres = area of site in square metres),
  - divide the area of the site by 4, and
  - the answer of that division (ignoring any remainder) is the maximum capacity that the site can hold at any one time.

By way of example, if a site is 25 square metres in size,  $25 \div 4 = 6.25$ , ignoring 0.25, the site should allow only six persons at any time inside the site, including staff.

- ✓ Clients should always maintain a 2-metre distance from other persons.
- ✓ All clients and employees are to wear a mask or a visor.
- ✓ Clients are advised not shake dirty laundry. This minimizes the possibility of dispersing the virus through the air.
- ✓ Hand sanitisers are to be available near entrances and close to the laundry machines
- ✓ Customers are to be instructed to use sanitisers before and after using the laundry machines.



- ✓ Laundry machine controls are to be disinfected before and after use. For this reason alcohol or disinfectant wipes are to be made available near the laundry machines by the management.
- ✓ Customers should be instructed to wash items in accordance with the directions.
- ✓ If possible, launder items using the warmest appropriate water setting for the items, and dry items completely.
- ✓ Dirty laundry that has been in contact with an infected person can safely be washed with other people's items.
- ✓ Wash items in a temperature of at least 60 degrees.
- ✓ Use the dryer. Drying clothes using heat will further prevent the spread of the virus.
- ✓ Use the right amount of soap. Too much soap creates excess suds that enable dirt and grime to remain trapped inside the fabric. The right amount of soap will properly clean and then be rinsed from the clothing.
- ✓ Clean and disinfect clothes baskets, carts and hampers.
- ✓ Customers should be instructed to disinfect clothes baskets before putting clean clothes in them
- ✓ Clean and disinfect clothes baskets, carts and hampers as often as possible and preferably use a bag liner, if available.
- ✓ Customers should be advised against waiting in the laundry for the cycle to finish. Initiatives such as Wash, Dry and Fold where the clean, dried clothes are folded by the laundry employees to be picked up by the customers are to be encouraged. Other initiatives that have the scope of decreasing the number of persons in a laundry e.g. customer waits outside or elsewhere and then is notified to pick up the dry clothes when the cycle is ready, should be encouraged.

## Business continuity

Success in controlling the COVID-19 pandemic depends on the full cooperation of all sectors of society – including businesses and services such as laundry services and their employees – who play an essential role in curbing the spread of this disease, whilst continuing to provide their services to the community. Public Health Authorities will support business continuity while coordinating action in the COVID-19 pandemic.

Recognising that the COVID-19 pandemic is a public health emergency and that business continuity in respect of COVID-19 should be founded in expert health advice and constructive dialogue, the following principles shall apply:

- ✓ All workers, regardless of their occupation or how they are engaged, have the right to a healthy and safe working environment.
- ✓ The COVID-19 pandemic requires a uniquely focused approach to work health and safety as it applies to businesses, workers and others in the workplace such as clients, suppliers and service providers.
- ✓ To keep laundry workplaces healthy and safe, businesses must, in consultation with workers, assess the way they work to identify, understand and quantify risks and to



- ✓ implement and review control measures to address those risks.
- ✓ As COVID-19 restrictions are gradually relaxed, management of laundries and workers must work together to adapt and promote safe work practices, consistent with advice from health authorities, to ensure their workplaces are ready for the social distancing, exemplary hygiene measures and specific preventive measures that will be an important part of the transition.
- ✓ Laundry services management and workers must actively control against the transmission of COVID-19 while at work, consistent with the updated advice from the Public Health Authorities.
- ✓ Laundry services management and workers must prepare for the possibility that there will be cases of COVID-19 in the workplace and be ready to respond immediately, appropriately, effectively and efficiently, and consistent with specific recommendations from health authorities.
- ✓ Some businesses such as those pertaining to laundry services may be struggling with where to start and how to implement the changes. As businesses slowly settle into the new normality, it is important that our workspaces adhere to social distancing measures so that businesses can begin working safely, trading fully again and thus lessen the impact on their own future viability and on the economy in general.

## Keeping Laundry workers safe and limiting the spread of COVID-19

The management of the laundry/laundrette should be doing the following at their workplace:

- ✓ ensure physical distancing by keeping a distance of at least 2 metres between people where possible
- ✓ Installing screening between workspaces and public areas is a quick and effective way to protect your staff and, if applicable, the general public from the risk of cross contamination.
- ✓ encourage all workers to frequently wash their hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and water or by using a 70% alcohol-based hand sanitiser and to practise good personal hygiene.
- ✓ be aware of COVID-19 symptoms (fever, cough, sore throat, shortness of breath, headaches, tiredness, muscle pain, loss of taste, loss of smell, vomiting and diarrhoea) and make sure workers do not come to work if they are unwell
- ✓ ensure that the workplace is regularly cleaned and disinfected
- ✓ have signs and posters around the workplace to remind workers and others of the risks of COVID-19 and the measures necessary to stop its spread.

### Specific general hygiene practices

- ✓ Steps need to be taken to ensure that additional hygiene practices become common

- ✓ place in the laundry.
- ✓ Staff need to pay special attention to hand hygiene and it is recommended that all staff wash or sanitize hands frequently.
- ✓ Hand sanitising units and antibacterial wipe dispensers are low cost, easy installations and will be essential in combatting the spread of infection.
- ✓ Frequent cleaning and disinfection of common surfaces further reduces risk of surface contamination spreading to healthy persons.
- ✓ Sufficient supplies of hand sanitizer and cleaning materials are the responsibility of the employer.
- ✓ Hand hygiene is of paramount importance to avoid infection. It is recommended that staff carry hand-sanitizer to use frequently, especially after touching common surfaces in cars, public transport, organised transport, inside the laundry, before and after meals, before and after going to the restroom, and before and after cigarette breaks.
- ✓ Use signs and posters to build awareness of good handwashing technique, the need to increase handwashing – these can be downloaded from [www.covid19health.gov.mt](http://www.covid19health.gov.mt) and are shown in Figure 1 below:

## 10 STEPS TO CLEAN YOUR HANDS



Figure 1: Recommended Handwashing Technique

### Occupational safety and worker's rights

- ✓ Management and owners of laundries and launderettes shall designate someone responsible for safety at work, whom the staff may contact.
- ✓ The employer is responsible for providing information and guidelines on occupational safety and the health and well-being of all members of staff.
- ✓ At a minimum, the occupational health and safety measures in accordance with these recommendations that relate to general occupational safety must be





- ✓ communicated to all those involved.
- ✓ Staff shall be informed of the rules on sick leave. Individuals displaying fever (37.2°C or more) or flu-like symptoms must remain at home until they have been cleared by a medical professional before they can return to work.
- ✓ Persons suffering from COVID-19 infections or their contacts must be cleared by the public health authorities.

#### Clients and contractors attending the laundry

- ✓ Minimise the number of employees attending to clients, deliveries and contractors as much as possible.
- ✓ Clients should be given clear instructions of requirements while they are in the laundry.
- ✓ Clients, contractors and other visitors should wear a mask or visor.
- ✓ Acrylic or tempered glass screens should separate staff from clients.
- ✓ Contractors who need to provide maintenance or repair services or perform other essential activities at laundries, should be given clear instructions of requirements while they are in the laundry.
- ✓ Ensure hand washing facilities, or if not possible, alcohol-based hand sanitizer, is readily available for workers, particularly after socially interacting with clients or handling deliveries of clothes, etc.
- ✓ Use and ask clients, delivery persons and contractors to use, electronic paperwork where possible, to minimise social interaction.
- ✓ Where possible, set up alternatives to requiring signatures. If a pen or other utensil is required for signature, ask that the pen or utensil is cleaned or sanitised before use or use your own.

#### Use of Personal Protective Equipment in Laundries

A long-sleeved fluid-resistant gown and disposable gloves should be worn during handling of soiled linen to prevent skin and mucous membrane exposure to blood and body substances. The long-sleeved gown and disposable gloves should be removed and hand hygiene performed following the handling of used linen. The technique for proper removal of gloves is shown in Figure 2 below:



Fig.2 proper removal of gloves

## Cleaning and disinfecting measures-

A combination of cleaning and disinfection will be most effective in removing the COVID- 19 virus from the environment within laundries and launderettes

### How to clean and disinfect

- ✓ Cleaning means to physically remove germs (bacteria and viruses), dirt and grime from surfaces using a detergent and water solution. A detergent is designed to break up oil and grease with the use of water. Anything labelled as a detergent will work.
- ✓ Disinfecting means using chemicals to kill germs on surfaces. It is important to clean before disinfecting because dirt and grime can reduce the ability of disinfectants to kill germs.
- ✓ Cleaning and disinfection will need to be increased as standard, with regular disinfecting of shared areas.
- ✓ High traffic contact zones, such as handles, laundry machine controls and knobs, machine surfaces, clothes receptacles and carts, etc will need frequent cleaning and disinfection throughout the day. Disposable paper towels that can be impregnated



- ✓ with disinfectant and alcohol wipes shall be freely available near laundry machines and clients should be instructed to wipe laundry machine controls and handles/knobs before and after using the laundry machines.
  - ✓ Disinfectants containing  $\geq 70\%$  alcohol, ammonium compounds, chlorine bleach or oxygen bleach are suitable for use on hard surfaces (surfaces where liquids pool, and do not soak in). The packaging or manufacturer's instructions will outline the correct way to use disinfectant. Disinfectants require time to be effective at killing viruses. If no time is specified, the disinfectant should be left for ten minutes before removing.
  - ✓ Delicate electronic equipment will need special precautions for cleaning/disinfection. Always check with the equipment's manufacturer about this.
-