Coronavirus Briefing

Hospitality Laundries

FEBRUARY 2020 | COMMUNICABLE DISEASES

The spread of Covid-19 (Wuhan Coronavirus) infection has tested the preparedness of our healthcare system and its supply chain in managing outbreak of this kind. What makes this outbreak even more challenging is that even the hospitality sector suddenly faced the question of managing linen that might have been handled by a person with a known/suspected infection. Such encounters expose strengths and weaknesses of the measures currently in place; the industry must address together any lack of preparedness and procedures to respond to such outbreaks.

This briefing paper is focused on hospitality sector and factors that the laundry operation may want to consider if they are notified that the 'linen-to- be-collected' are (or may be) infected. The TSA is working with the UK Hospitality Association to cater to the hotel's portion of responsibilities. That may include them informing the laundries appropriately, bagging the infected linen and/or assisting in loading the linen with appropriate protective equipment. Laundries should consider developing policies and a detailed risk assessment to manage the infected linen – this should also include ways to assist hotels fulfil their role. In our discussions with many laundry operators in the hospitality sector, the following aspects were discussed; you may want to consider these to suit your operations.

1. Developing a working relationship with hotels/venues to ensure that the hotels have the confidence and right communications channels available to promptly inform you in case of a suspected or known case of communicable disease.
2. Once the customer alerts the laundry of a suspected infection, preparedness to work together with the hotels to decide whether a hazardous waste handler to be employed or to take the linen back to the laundry to be processed. Since the main aspect of the risk to be managed remains with the laundry, the laundry should have the ability to make a final decision on what to be done with the linen regardless of who owns the stock.
3. Preparedness on laundry operator's part to provide appropriate protective bags (alginate/dissolvable bags and/or plastic bags for outer protection).
4. Adequate information made available to the hotels to help them effectively manage the bagging procedure.
5. The processes involved when linen with suspected or known infection are at different stages of its journey to being collected by the laundry:
   a. When the linen is identified and contained within a room and / or clearly traceable – depending on the risk assessment, the hotel should consider quarantining the room and the linen bagged (as per the agreed procedure), clearly labelled and ready for collection. Depending on the decision you have taken as per Point 2 above, if you decide to bring the linen back to the laundry, you should consider wash processes involving washer extractors, tunnel washers and any combination of these to validate appropriate levels of disinfection.

b. When the linen cannot be traced any longer .i.e. already been removed from the room in question, mixed with other linen and waiting for collection by the laundry – the laundry should consider strong policies, processes and wash programmes to manage the risk in relation to the entire stock in the delivery/collection vehicle. You may want to consider whether you would like to use a hazardous waste provider to dispose of the line safely. If you decide to bring the linen back to the laundry, you should:

    i. conduct a detailed risk assessment (including the risk to the laundry staff)

    ii. consider wash processes involving washer extractors, tunnel washers and any combination of these to validate appropriate levels of disinfection.

c. When the linen cannot be traced any longer and already in the possession of the laundry - the laundry should consider strong policies, processes and wash programmes to manage the risk in relation to the entire stock being processed at the time. You may want to consider whether you would like to use a hazardous waste provider to dispose of the line safely. If you decide to bring the linen back to the laundry, you should:

d. conduct a detailed risk assessment (including the risk to the laundry staff)

e. consider wash processes involving washer extractors, tunnel washers and any combination of these to validate appropriate levels of disinfection.

f. Unknown/unanticipated exposure – By keeping a diligent eye on any serious outbreaks of infection in your region, you may be in a better position to identify and manage risks to your people and operations. Depending on your risk assessment at the time, consider ways to manage staff allocation taking in to account any employees with weakened immune or pre-existing conditions.

6. Establishing a robust hand hygiene procedure for drivers and sorting staff.

7. PPE/RPE and Risk Assessments: Depending on the results of the local risk assessment, consider options regarding Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and/or Respiratory Protective Equipment (RPE) after all other reasonably practicable measures have been introduced to prevent or control exposure.

8. Documenting lessons learned and working with your customers to develop a review process.

Please contact the TSA by telephone on **020 3151 5600** or by email on **tsa@tsa-uk.org**