

Increase Healthcare Personnel, Patient and Public Health and Safety

TRSA members are commercial and industrial laundries and facility services companies that supply, launder and maintain linens, uniforms and garments; and supplier partners that provide the equipment, chemicals, linens, workwear and other supplies that improve employee, customer and public safety. These include healthcare facilities, grocery stores, infrastructure maintenance, food processing, public utilities (water and energy), first-responders, federal and state governments, laboratories, pharmaceutical manufacturing, and other fundamental supply chain businesses.

BACKGROUND

The prolonged outbreak of SARS-CoV-2 has heightened concerns regarding hygiene and sustainability especially surrounding the stability and survival of coronaviruses on various surfaces including textiles. TRSA, along with its international partners, conducted a study by De Montfort University to examine the survivability of the laundering process of the coronavirus on fabrics commonly used in the healthcare industry.

The study found viruses like the strain that causes COVID-19 can survive on clothing and transmit to other surfaces for up to 72 hours depending on the material make-up of the product. The results showed that 100% polyester poses the highest risk for transmission of the virus, with the infectious virus still present after three days with the potential to transfer to other surfaces. On 100% cotton, the virus lasted for 24 hours, while on a polycotton blend, the virus only survived for six hours. In short, a virus can pose a public risk on Healthcare Personnel Attire (HPA) while being worn in public (i.e., restaurant, public transportation, grocery store, etc.).

“When the pandemic first started, there was very little understanding of how long coronavirus could survive on textiles,” said Dr. Katie Laird, head of the Infectious Disease Research Group at DMU. “Our findings show that three of the most used textiles in healthcare pose a risk for transmission of the virus. If nurses and healthcare workers take their uniforms home, they could be leaving traces of the virus on other surfaces.”

The study also showed virtually all industrial wash processes will effectively eliminate any infection risk caused by coronavirus and other pathogens. The exception is home laundering of Healthcare Personnel Attire (scrubs). The home laundering process does not reach the needed temperature to effectively eliminate the infection risk.

Further, a 2015 study, published in Nursing Standard magazine, surveyed hospital staff across four hospitals. The data showed only 74% of respondents reported laundering their scrubs after every shift. The study also highlighted that not all healthcare staff are following the recommended hospital guidelines regarding the laundering and aftercare of scrubs. Only 32 % of the respondents washed their scrubs according to hospital guidelines.

The conclusion is that fabrics potentially contaminated with the virus should be managed within a controlled environment where the segregation of soiled linen is well managed. It is essential that the processing sites are well-equipped to manage the risks of cross contamination and have adequate procedures and practices in place. HPA’s should be washed in line with recognized healthcare laundering procedures such as those recognized by the Healthcare Infection Control Practices Advisory Committee (HICPAC).

ACTION

Require healthcare facilities to provide industrial laundered, hygienically clean Healthcare Personnel Attire (HPA) for all healthcare workers per shift and require that healthcare workers not leave the facility with soiled HPAs.