

Waste management for healthcare facilities and home/lodgings

Interim advice

(last updated 17 March 2020)

This document outlines the minimum requirements for healthcare facilities and home environments for the handling of clinical (medical) waste from patients or residents with suspected or confirmed COVID-19. Also refer to relevant standards (AS3816:2018 Management of clinical and related wastes) and local policies and procedures.

This advice will be reviewed and adjusted when or if more information becomes available.

COVID-19 is caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, which is not classified by the Australian Dangerous Goods Code as a highly infectious (category A) pathogen. SA Health, in-line with national and international guidelines, recommends that all clinical waste from a COVID-19 patient should be handled as per local policies for waste from patients on transmission-based precautions.

Healthcare Facilities

Clinical waste bins and non-sharp clinical waste

Suspected/confirmed COVID-19 patients non-sharp clinical waste key points:

- > clinical waste is categorised by the colour yellow in South Australia and is incinerated
- > dispose of non-sharp clinical waste into a yellow biohazard bag, which complies with Australian Standards AS 3816:2018 clause 5.3.8. Biohazard bags should be tied off in the patient care area.
- > bagged clinical waste is then placed into a lined yellow 2-wheeled mobile garbage bin (MGB) e.g. 240lt Sulo™ type bin with a lockable lid
- > all yellow MGBs used for clinical waste are to be lined with a large yellow bin liner (contact your waste service for queries regarding supply and lining service.)
- > personal protective equipment (PPE) e.g. disposable long-sleeved gowns, gloves, surgical masks and eye protection (goggles or face shield) can be worn by staff handling or transporting yellow MGBs based on a task risk assessment
- > hand hygiene must be performed including when donning/doffing PPE, and after handling or transporting waste bags or bins
- > bins must not be overfilled, when the clinical waste MGB is 3/4 full, the large yellow bin liner should be carefully tied off using a zip tie and the lid secured/locked
- > the external surface of the MGB should be wiped over with a TGA listed hospital grade disinfectant prior to transporting to the waste collection area.

Sharp clinical waste disposal

Sharps must be disposed of into a sharps container that meets Australian Standard AS4031 Non-reusable containers for the collection of sharp medical items used in health care areas. These must not be overfilled and be sealed when ¾ full.

Sharps must not be put directly into MGBs; sharps must first be discarded into a sharps container and then placed into the MGB.

Non-healthcare facilities e.g. homes, hotels, or other lodgings

People in home isolation with suspected or confirmed COVID-19:

- > Dispose of all used personal care items such as tissues, disposable masks, gloves, and other items contaminated with respiratory secretions or other body fluids in a rubbish bin inside your room which is lined with a plastic bag.
- > When the bin in your room is 3/4 full, “tie-off” the plastic bag to prevent spillage of the contents. Avoid touching the inside of the bag and dispose of the bag into the general household waste bin. This waste should NOT go into the recycling bin.
- > After handling and disposal of waste, hands must be washed using soap and water then dried with a clean towel that is dedicated for your personal use only.

Healthcare workers conducting home visits or care of a person with suspected or confirmed COVID-19:

- > Personal protective equipment (PPE) (i.e. gloves, surgical mask, eye protection and gown), must be worn during clinical care including when conducting assessments and collecting samples and when handling waste.
- > Putting on and taking off PPE should be done outside the patient’s home/lodgings in the correct sequence (avoid touching the outer surface).
- > Hand hygiene must be performed as per the 5 moments and as per PPE use procedures and when handling any waste.
- > Use disposable care equipment whenever possible, taking only the required equipment in to the person’s home. Used disposable equipment to be treated as clinical waste.
- > If the use of reusable equipment is unavoidable, this must be decontaminated after each use in accordance with the manufacturer’s instructions.
- > Do not leave clinical waste such as used PPE, medical equipment etc. in the patient’s home – this is considered as clinical waste.
- > All clinical waste is to be bagged in a yellow clinical waste bag when the episode of care completed, then secured/tied off prior to leaving the persons home. This bag is then to be placed into a plastic box/tub with a secure lid in the boot of the car. Upon return to the healthcare facility, dispose of the clinical waste bag into a yellow clinical waste bin/yellow mobile garbage bin. Clean and disinfect the transport box/tub.

Note: All sharps must be disposed of into a clinical waste sharps container and not directly into yellow mobile garbage bin.

References:

1. Standards Australia, AS 3816:2018 Management of clinical and related wastes, 12-12-2018
2. Centers for Disease Control www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/infection-control/control-recommendations.html
3. Australian Government Department of Health www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2020/02/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-the-marine-industry_0.pdf
4. New South Wales – Department of Health www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/factsheets/Pages/advice-for-suspected.aspx

For more information

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Communicable Disease Control Branch
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