

Uniforms

Key Points

Clinical Staff who wear a uniform should change into & out of uniform at the workplace.

Staff who are permitted to wear a clinical uniform to and from work should have it covered completely when travelling.

A clean uniform should be worn for each shift.

Where laundry facilities are available these should be used for laundering clinical uniforms. Where staff launder their own uniforms they must be provided with written instructions which reflect current best practice guidelines.

Staff must change as soon as possible if uniform or clothes become visibly soiled or contaminated with blood or body fluids

Background

The current scientific evidence does not clearly indicate whether healthcare workers clothing are a significant source of transmission of infectious microorganisms.

However, the way in which staff dress and present themselves may impact on the public perception of care.

The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Northern Ireland has a policy on the principles that must be applied to the wearing of uniforms. This policy is to ensure safe practice while further research is carried out into the links between healthcare workers clothing and the transmission of infectious microorganisms.

Whilst not all clinical staff wear uniforms the guidance applies to all clinical staff whether or not a uniform is worn.

This dress code policy does not apply to personal protective equipment which is covered by separate guidance.

Northern Ireland Recommendations

- Where changing facilities are available, clinical staff who wear a uniform should change into and out of uniform at the workplace.
- Staff who are permitted to wear a clinical uniform to and from work should have it covered completely when travelling. Staff should not go shopping or socialising in uniform or undertake similar activities in public.
- A clean uniform should be worn for each shift and a sufficient supply of uniforms should be provided to facilitate this.
- Staff must change as soon as is practical if uniform or clothes become visibly soiled or contaminated with blood or body fluids.
- Where laundry facilities are available these should be used for laundering clinical uniforms. Where local laundry arrangements are not available and staff launder their own uniforms they must be provided with written instructions.
- Non-uniform staff should launder personal clothing regularly and according to manufacturers' instructions.
- Identification must be worn by all staff.
- Wrist or hand jewellery, apart from a plain band ring, must not be worn by clinical staff when carrying out clinical procedures. Wrist watches must be removed before performing hand hygiene.
- Short sleeves should ideally be worn in the clinical environment, or the sleeves should be rolled to elbow length before carrying out clinical activities.
- All staff working in clinical areas should secure long hair above the collar.
- Clinical staff who do not wear a uniform should not wear any loose clothing such as unsecured ties, draped scarves or similar items.
- Staff should keep finger nails short and clean and must not wear false nails or nail varnish.
- Foot wear should protect against sharps injury and be impermeable to blood and body fluids. It should be suitable for purpose and comply with the relevant health and safety requirements.

References

1. HSS(MD) 5/2008 Regional Dress code and Recommendations on Staff Changing Facilities for Northern Ireland. [Available at <http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/dresscodepolicy.pdf>]
2. RCN (2005) Wipe it out RCN campaign on MRSA 2005. [Available at <http://www.rcn.org.uk/resources/mrsa/healthcarestaff/uniforms/index.php>]