



ASPAN

American Society of PeriAnesthesia Nurses

Clinical Practice: Frequently Asked Question

Q: What is the national trend for being able to wear personal, home-laundered scrubs to work in the PACU?

A: "Standard II - Environment of Care," found in the *2019-2020 Perianesthesia Nursing Standards, Practice Recommendations and Interpretive Statements*, states: "Personnel and visitor dress codes are determined by institutional policies."¹ Unfortunately, no other recommendations in the Standards address attire worn by perianesthesia personnel.

In 1999, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) published a "Guideline for the Prevention of Surgical Site Infection." This guideline indicated there were no well-controlled studies relating surgical site infections to laundering of scrubs. Where and how to launder scrubs was described as an unresolved matter, and no specific recommendation was issued.² At the time this guideline was published, it implied that scrubs laundered at home and worn from home did not pose a risk to patients. It also suggested that, at the end of the day, those same scrubs posed no health threat in the home environment.

In 2003, the CDC and the Healthcare Infection Control Practices Advisory Committee issued guidelines for infection control in healthcare facilities. Although clothing contact is not known as a significant mechanism for transmission of pathogens, the guidelines recommend control measures to prevent healthcare associated infections related to contaminated clothing, i.e., clothing soiled by blood or body fluids while at work. These control measures were founded in hygiene principles, common sense, and consensus,³ and recommended that when clothing is contaminated with blood, emesis, urine, or any other body fluid, the clothing should be immediately removed and laundered at the healthcare facility.³

The Association of PeriOperative Registered Nurses (AORN) does not support home laundered attire being worn in the operating rooms, citing a lack of evidence related to safety of healthcare workers, their families, and patients during surgical procedures.⁴ In revised practice guidelines published in 2011, AORN took a stronger stand on surgical attire. AORN now recommends that surgical attire be laundered in a healthcare accredited laundry facility.⁴

As to laundering scrubs worn by perianesthesia nurses, a general survey of clinical practice constituents from across the country revealed wide variations in opinion and practice. It is obvious that each healthcare institution has a tailored approach to handling scrubs based on knowledge of related research, associated costs, perceptions of staff and consumers, and cost/benefit breakdowns. Some perianesthesia staff function in expanded clinical roles, including but not limited to, providing occasional clinical support for bedside invasive procedures and emergency support in the operating room. The possible exposure of staff and/or patient to potentially infectious contaminants must also be considered. Clearly, the current state of the evidence indicates an opportunity for further studies related to laundering methods. Such studies are needed to further support the decision process related to the question, "home laundered or hospital laundered scrubs?"

The AANA published an article in 2016 which offered a brief checklist of recommendations when laundering scrubs at home.⁵ These include, but are not limited to:

- Use a machine that can reach water temperatures of at least 60°C
- Use bleach-based detergents when not contraindicated by the garment's features
- Use the highest settings for heat on the dryer and iron scrubs immediately after washing
- Use separate laundry loads for scrubs
- Protect materials from contamination within the home environment by placing them in a secured bag and don them only after arriving at work.

References:

1. The American Society of PeriAnesthesia Nurses. *2019-2020 Perianesthesia Nursing Standards, Practice Recommendations and Interpretive Statements*. Cherry Hill, NJ: ASPAN; 2018.
2. Belkin NL. Home laundering of soiled surgical scrubs: Surgical site infections and the home environment. *Am J Inf Control*, 2001; 29(1).
3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Healthcare Infection Control Practices Advisory Committee. Guidelines for environmental infection control in health-care facilities. Updated 2017. Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/infectioncontrol/pdf/guidelines/environmental-guidelines-P.pdf> Accessed July 24, 2019.
4. Association of periOperative Registered Nurses. Guideline at a Glance: Surgical Attire. *AORN J*. 2016. Available at: <https://aornjournal.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1016/S0001-2092%2816%2930610-X>. Accessed July 24, 2019.
5. Vera CM, Umadhay T, Fisher M. Laundering methods for reusable surgical scrubs: A literature review. *AANA J*. 2016;84(4):246-252.

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