

Safer practice notice

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Notice

10 January 2007

Immediate action	<input type="checkbox"/>
Action	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Update	<input type="checkbox"/>
Information request	<input type="checkbox"/>

Ref: NPSA/2007/15

Colour coding hospital cleaning materials and equipment

Colour coding of hospital cleaning materials and equipment ensures that these items are not used in multiple areas, therefore reducing the risk of cross-infection.

The National Patient Safety Agency (NPSA) has developed a National Colour Coding Scheme for cleaning materials.¹ The recommendation is that all NHS organisations adopt this code as standard in order to improve the safety of hospital cleaning, ensure consistency and provide clarity for staff.

There is currently no single colour code in use across the NHS. The National Colour Coding Scheme is designed to standardise, and in some cases streamline, existing schemes. It will have minimal resource implications for the service.²

Cleaning materials and equipment that should be colour coded

All cleaning materials and equipment, for example, cloths (re-usable and disposable), mops, buckets, aprons and gloves, should be colour coded. The method used to colour code items should be clear, permanent and in accordance with existing local practice. The NPSA is happy to advise as necessary.

Materials and equipment that do not need to be colour coded

Cleaning products such as bleach and disinfectants do not need to be colour coded. Also, the code does not extend to catering equipment (for example, chopping boards and knives) where there is already a well-recognised and well-established procedure to ensure food hygiene and food separation issues are addressed.

Action for the NHS

The NPSA recommends that all NHS organisations providing inpatient services in England and Wales should:

- make a policy decision to adopt the National Colour Coding Scheme where existing practice differs. The national scheme is on page three of this notice;
- develop an action plan for introducing the National Colour Coding Scheme;
- raise awareness of any revised practice amongst healthcare staff.

For response by:

- NHS organisations in England and Wales

For action by:

- Chief executives

The NPSA recommends NHS organisations inform:

- Risk managers
- Patient advice/liaison service staff
- Community Health Councils
- Service or facilities managers, hotel services

managers and catering service managers

The NPSA has informed:

- Chief executives
- Directors of nursing
- Directors of infection prevention and control
- Directors of estates and facilities
- Healthcare Commission
- Healthcare Inspectorate Wales
- NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency

- Welsh Health Supplies
- Welsh Health Estates
- Royal College of Nursing
- Infection Control Nurses Association
- Health Estates Facilities Managers Association
- Association of Domestic Management
- Hospital Caterers Association
- Quality Improvement Scotland and DHSSPS, Northern Ireland

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Action deadlines for the Safety Alert Broadcast System (SABS)

Deadline (action underway): 31 March 2007

Action plan to be agreed and actions started

Deadline (action complete): 31 March 2008

All actions to be completed

Further information about SABS can be found at:

www.info.doh.gov.uk/sar2/cmopatie.nsf

Background

Most hospitals already have a colour coding scheme for cleaning materials and equipment. However, there is presently no consistency across the NHS. It has been estimated that there are as many as 50 different schemes currently in use, mostly revolving around the same core colours but with their specific meaning varying. Sometimes, for historical reasons (for example, as a result of mergers), even hospitals within the same trust have different schemes in place.

This presents a potential risk when domestic staff move from organisation to organisation, or even in some cases from site to site. A standardised code will mitigate the risk of possible cross-contamination.

Supporting materials

A free starter pack to support the implementation of the National Colour Coding Scheme, containing A4 and A3 posters and pocket-sized reference cards, will be sent by the NPSA to every appropriate NHS organisation. Once implementation is underway, additional materials can be ordered free of charge.³ It is intended that a pocket-sized reference guide should be available to every cleaner in the NHS.

Professional organisations' views

The NPSA has sought views and advice from the Association of Domestic Managers, the Infection Control Nurses Association, the Hospital Caterers Association and the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health Officers. In addition, we have consulted with NHS staff, including matrons and front-line cleaning staff. Consultation has also taken place with the NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency and Welsh Health Supplies to ensure that appropriate procurement arrangements are in place.

Microfibre cleaning systems

Organisations who have introduced microfibre cleaning systems should seek advice from the NPSA on an individual basis (contact details are on page four).

Evaluation

In England, the Healthcare Commission plans to refer to the importance of colour coding in a revision of its inspection guides for assessing compliance with core standards (including new guidance on the safe management of healthcare waste.⁴)

Adoption of the National Colour Coding Scheme will also be monitored through the Patient Environment Action Team (PEAT) inspection process.

In Wales, Healthcare Inspectorate Wales (HIW) and the Regional Offices of the Welsh Assembly Government will monitor implementation of the recommendations in this safer practice notice and compliance with the National Colour Coding Scheme.



National Colour Coding Scheme

Red

Bathrooms, washrooms, showers, toilets, basins and bathroom floors

Blue

General areas including wards, departments, offices and basins in public areas

Green

Catering departments, ward kitchen areas and patient food service at ward level

Yellow

Isolation areas

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Further information

For further information about the NPSA's work on hospital cleaning and the National Colour Coding Scheme go to: www.npsa.nhs.uk/health/alerts

For further information about this safer practice notice, contact:

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Endnotes

- 1 This colour code differs from, and supersedes, that proposed in the NHS Estates Healthcare Cleaning Manual (Department of Health, March 2004)
- 2 The cost of implementing these recommendations will vary depending on current local practice. However, by way of illustration, the Princess Royal Hospital, Haywards Heath (a 450 bed site) switched existing cleaning materials to colour coded cleaning materials for a one-off cost of approximately £400.
- 3 Call the NHS distribution line on 08701 555455 after 31 January 2007.
- 4 Healthcare Commission. Core standard C4(e). Subject to approval at the time of printing.

 A safer practice notice strongly advises implementing particular recommendations or solutions.

This safer practice notice was written in the following context:
It represents the view of the National Patient Safety Agency, which was arrived at after consideration of the evidence available. It is anticipated that healthcare staff will take it into account when designing services and delivering patient care. This does not, however, override the individual responsibility of healthcare staff to make decisions appropriate to local circumstances and the needs of patients and to take appropriate professional advice where necessary.

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