

Regulation of infection prevention and control

Practice Alert September 2009: Mattresses

The Care Quality Commission's programme of inspection of NHS trusts against the *Code of Practice (for the NHS on the prevention and control of healthcare associated infections and related guidance)* is well under way this year, with over 80 inspections already completed. Some common themes are emerging, and we wanted to draw your attention to one of the most frequently found concerns.

What is the issue?

One of the most common findings is problems with the integrity of mattress covers used on patient beds, and lack of knowledge by ward staff on how they check patency of the mattress covers. Our assessors have repeatedly found mattresses confirmed as ready for use, which, when unzipped, are found to be contaminated due to a breach in the integrity of the cover. Some have been immediately condemned by trust staff as a result of this check.

The majority of mattresses seen consist of a foam inner core with a moisture proof outer cover. There are several different manufacturers of these mattresses and all should provide specific guidance on cleaning and checking. There have been several MHRA alerts issued over the past few years regarding this type of mattress which confirm that mattresses should be unzipped and the foam inner core checked for ingress of fluids.

What should you do?

Trusts already have a system for cleaning mattresses between patients, and for annual audits; most undertake periodic checks of the inner core. Our findings indicate that despite these measures, more needs to be done. The only reliable way to verify that there is no strikethrough to the core is to confirm by unzipping and testing the cover and checking the foam on a regular basis.

Where to learn more about HCAI inspections

- Our website: www.cqc.org.uk (see guidance for professionals)
- HCAI Business Delivery Manager: Louisa Power, 0207 448 9038, louisa.power@cqc.org.uk
- E-mail enquiries: HCAI.inspections@cqc.org.uk