

## For healthcare facilities, community healthcare, residential care facilities, Medi-hotels, COVID-19 testing clinics, airports and home environments

This document outlines the current recommendations for healthcare facilities, community healthcare, residential care facilities, Medi-hotels, COVID-19 testing clinics, airports and home environments for the handling of waste from individuals with suspected or confirmed COVID-19.

### Waste categorisation

COVID-19, which is caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, is not currently classified by the Australian Dangerous Goods Code as a highly infectious ([Category A](#)) pathogen.<sup>1</sup>

SA Health recommends all waste generated in relation to care and activities involving suspected or confirmed COVID-19 cases should be handled as per standard and transmission-based precautions and be discarded in general waste, unless visibly contaminated or meets the definition of medical (clinical) waste below.

- > **Standards Australia AS 3816:2018 Management of clinical and related wastes** which states: *“Waste shall be categorised by its properties and characteristics irrespective of its source.”*<sup>2</sup>
- > **The Australian Guidelines for the Prevention and Control of Infection in Healthcare (2019)** which states: *“Regardless of where waste is generated (e.g. from isolation rooms/patients versus routine patient-care areas), the principles of determining whether it is to be treated as clinical or general waste remain the same.”*<sup>3</sup>

Sites, service providers and facilities are to ensure practices and procedures are compliant with relevant local, state and national guidelines and standards.<sup>1-6</sup>

### Medical (clinical) waste

- > [Medical \(clinical\) waste](#) includes waste consisting of all sharps and includes, human tissue including bone, any liquid body fluid, and laboratory specimens.<sup>2,4</sup> This may include personal protective equipment (PPE) that is grossly visibly contaminated with blood and/or body fluids.
- > Medical (clinical) waste is categorised by the colour yellow in South Australia and is incinerated and cannot be disposed of into the general waste or recycling waste streams.<sup>2</sup>
- > Yellow biohazard bags should be tied off at the point of use and disposed of into an approved clinical waste bin e.g. yellow 2-wheeled mobile garbage bin (MGB) with a lockable lid.\* These bins are to be stored as per AS 3816:2018. Sites such as airports may choose to dispose of medical (clinical) waste in quarantine bins and should refer to local policy.
- > Medical sharps (commonly known as “sharps”) must not be put directly into clinical waste bins. Sharps must be disposed of into a sharps container, preferably at the point of care or point of use, that meets [Australian Standard AS 4031](#). Sharps containers must not be overfilled and must be sealed when  $\frac{3}{4}$  full (or at designated fill line). Sharps containers are then to be placed into an approved medical (clinical) waste bin.<sup>5</sup>
- > Staff who are required to transport approved medical (clinical) waste bins should wear appropriate PPE as per standard and transmission-based precautions which may include disposable long-sleeved gowns, gloves, surgical masks and eye protection (goggles, safety glasses or face shield). Refer to local policy and guidelines.
- > Hand hygiene must be performed prior to donning (putting on) and after doffing (taking off) PPE, and after handling or transporting waste bags or bins.

## Waste management

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- > Any waste receptacle, bin or MGB must not be overfilled. When sharps containers and/or medical (clinical) waste bins are  $\frac{3}{4}$  full, the lid should be secured/locked while awaiting collection from the secure location. Waste bags within medical (clinical) bins should not be pushed down or moved to create more room in the receptacle as this may increase risk of aerosol contamination exposure to blood and/or body fluids.
- > The external surface of the medical (clinical) waste bin should be wiped over with a [TGA listed hospital grade](#) disinfectant prior to transporting to the waste collection area if there is evidence of visible soiling, and as per local policies.

\*Note: For community healthcare providers where there is no medical (clinical) waste bin available at the point of waste generation (e.g. home visit), the closed off biohazard bag can be transported in a rigid sided container with a secure fitting lid in the boot of the provider's car back to a central medical (clinical) waste collection point.

### General waste (non-medical/clinical waste)

- > General waste is waste which is not recycled or reused and does not pose a threat or risk to public health or safety and meets landfill acceptance criteria.<sup>2</sup> This may include PPE or other items that have been risk assessed as not visibly contaminated gross amounts of blood and/or body fluids. Materials that are only stained can be disposed of in general waste.
- > When the bin is  $\frac{3}{4}$  full, it should be "tied-off" to prevent spillage of the contents for collection and disposal. This waste should NOT go into the recycling bin.
- > Hand hygiene must be performed after handling or transporting waste bags or bins (regardless of glove use).
- > If in doubt when assessing the level of contamination and/or the required waste stream, default to the medical (clinical) waste streams.

### References

1. Department of Health. Requirements for the Packaging and Transport of Pathology Specimens and Associated Materials 3rd Edition. Appendix H.  
<https://www1.health.gov.au/internet/publications/publishing.nsf/Content/npaac-pub-transp-path-spec-drft-transp-appendh>
2. Standards Australia, AS 3816:2018 *Management of clinical and related wastes*  
<https://www.standards.org.au/standards-catalogue/sa-snz/health/he-011/as--3816-colon-2018>
3. Australian Guidelines for the Prevention and Control of Infection in Healthcare (2019)  
<https://www.safetyandquality.gov.au/publications-and-resources/resource-library/australian-guidelines-prevention-and-control-infection-healthcare>
4. South Australian Environment Protection Authority (EPA). Medical waste: Storage, transport and disposal  
[https://www.epa.sa.gov.au/files/4771338\\_guide\\_medical.pdf](https://www.epa.sa.gov.au/files/4771338_guide_medical.pdf)
5. [Australian Standard AS 4031](#): *Non-reusable containers for the collection of sharp medical items used in health care areas*
6. Government of South Australia [Environment Protection \(Waste to Resources\) Policy 2010](#)
7. WHO, Safe management of wastes from health-care activities. Second edition.  
[https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/85349/9789241548564\\_eng.pdf;jsessionid=739A39F01078903B6C070452C62189CB?sequence=1](https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/85349/9789241548564_eng.pdf;jsessionid=739A39F01078903B6C070452C62189CB?sequence=1)

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### For more information

**Infection Control Service  
Communicable Disease Control Branch  
Department for Health and Wellbeing  
SA Health**  
[www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/COVID2019](http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/COVID2019)  
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