

# Sanitizing Your Laundry

Are you wondering whether you can get sick by touching the clothing or bedding of a person who is sick? According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, some viruses “may remain viable for hours to days on surfaces made from a variety of materials.” The good news is that normal laundering will clean your clothing and textiles well enough, making them safe to wear or use. However, if you would like to take extra precautions in cleaning clothing and textiles worn or used by someone who has been ill, here are some tips:

- Wear disposable gloves when handling laundry that has been exposed to someone who has been ill, or wash your hands after handling the dirty laundry.
- Place dirty laundry in a plastic laundry basket that can be cleaned afterward, or line your laundry basket with a disposable trash bag.
- You may choose to wash clothing and textiles belonging to a sick person separately from other household laundry. However, with proper handling, you may safely wash those items with other laundry. When combining laundry, read the care label on the item, and take the following steps to sort it for the best results.
  - Do not “shake” or “snap” your dirty clothes to prevent the dispersion of germs.
  - Keep similar colors together.
  - Separate “heavy” clothes such as jeans from “light weight” clothes such as blouses.
    - ***For best results, do not wash sheets and towels with clothes, nor with each other.***
    - Wash sheets only with other sheets and towels only with other towels — this is because of their water absorption and the way sheets and towels affect the agitation and cleaning of other items included in the load.
  - Wash excessively dirty or soiled laundry separately — this prevents soil transfer onto cleaner items.
  - Follow the manufacturer’s directions to measure detergent.
  - If your washer has a “steam,” “sanitize,” “extra rinse,” or “2nd rinse” cycle, use these for added cleaning.
  - Use the warmest possible setting that is appropriate for your laundry, and dry thoroughly in your dryer.
- You may also add a chlorine bleach to the wash cycle. But check the care labels of your laundry first. The chlorine bleach should have a concentration of sodium hypochlorite between 5.25% and 6.15%. Follow the directions for laundry purposes, and remember never to pour bleach directly onto your clothes or textiles. Oxygen bleaches offer some disinfecting properties but are not as effective as chlorine bleach. Please note that some popular laundry sanitizers only kill bacteria, not viruses. You add them to the fabric softener dispenser or during the rinse cycle, not in the wash cycle with the detergent.
- Be aware of laundry sanitizing myths. Distilled white vinegar is a useful multipurpose cleaner and offers many laundry benefits. It removes odors and dissolves detergent residues. However, there is no evidence that vinegar will kill viruses. The same holds true for pine oil-based products. Pine oil products with at least 80% pine oil will help remove some germs from the laundry. But the CDC website does not recommend these products for killing viruses.

**Reference(s):**

- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/cleaning-disinfection.html>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-prevent-spread.html>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/infectioncontrol/guidelines/environmental/background/laundry.html>
- <https://www.thespruce.com/top-uses-for-vinegar-in-laundry-2147286>

**Source:**

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