

# Curtain Hygiene Checklist for Irish Nursing Homes

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What Regulation 27 actually requires, what the national frequency guidance actually says, and the records an inspector will ask to see. Free to use and free to copy.

**In one line:** Irish law sets no fixed curtain-cleaning interval. National Clinical Guideline No. 30 (2023) places long-term care in the **low risk** band — bed curtains **change or clean twice yearly**, plus **on discharge of any resident with an MDRO or other infectious disease**, with escalation during an outbreak. What HIQA assesses is whether you have a documented schedule that is actually implemented and can be evidenced.

## 1 What Regulation 27 says

Regulation 27 (**Infection control**) of S.I. No. 415/2013 is a single sentence: “The registered provider shall ensure that procedures, consistent with the standards for the prevention and control of healthcare associated infections published by the Authority are implemented by staff”

- It does **not** mention curtains, soft furnishings, cleaning or any frequency — and neither do HIQA’s 2017 HCAI standards or its 2018 community IPC standards. The word “curtain” appears in none of them.
- The operative test is **implementation**, not the existence of a policy document.
- Note also **Regulation 9 (Residents’ rights)**: privacy curtains that are absent — for example away at laundry with no spare hung — have been recorded as a finding in their own right.

No curtain cleaning company can be “HIQA approved” or “HIQA certified”. No such scheme exists. HIQA regulates the centre, not its contractors.

## 2 The current national frequency guidance

Source: **Infection Prevention and Control — National Clinical Guideline No. 30**, Department of Health / NCEC, May 2023, Vol. 2, §7.1, Tables 39–40. The guideline states its table sets “recommended minimum frequencies”, is “applicable to all settings”, and that “facilities should develop and implement a local cleaning schedule and policy that suits their environment”

| Risk band        | Settings (Table 39)                                                          | Curtains and blinds (Table 40)                                  |
|------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|
| Very high risk   | Outbreak in a high-risk area                                                 | Bed curtains — change or clean <b>weekly</b> and upon discharge |
| High risk        | ICU, HDU, burns, renal, operating suite, emergency departments               | Bed curtains — change or clean <b>monthly</b>                   |
| Significant risk | General wards                                                                | Bed curtains — change or clean <b>biannually</b>                |
| <b>Low risk</b>  | Rehabilitation, <b>long-term care</b> , primary care, office-based, homecare | Bed curtains — change or clean <b>biannually</b>                |

**In every band**, a resident with an MDRO or other infectious disease triggers a change or clean **on discharge**. The guideline also expressly permits escalation: the IPC or outbreak control team “may advise escalation from the Low risk schedule to the significant risk schedule or higher.”

Two honest caveats. NCG 30 says “biannually” for curtains but “6-monthly” elsewhere in the same table, so twice-a-year is the reasonable reading rather than a certainty — write it as “twice a year (NCG 30 states ‘biannually’)” if the distinction matters. And its stated method is “replace with laundered curtains”; the frequency column says “change or clean”, so cleaning in place meets the interval, but expect the question.

## 3 Where “every three months” comes from

You will hear this stated as fact. It is real, and it does not apply to a nursing home. It comes from the **HSE National Cleaning Standards Manual — Appendices (September 2006), Appendix 5, Element 40**, which sets, for its “Very High Risk” band: “Clean, change or replace yearly, bed curtains quarterly and in accordance with isolation policy.”

- It applies to **bed and cubicle curtains only**. Window curtains are yearly in every band but low risk.
- “Very High Risk” there means one thing: “Control of Infection Wards & areas cohorting infectious patients.” Even ICU, theatres and A&E sit a band below at twice a year.
- The manual is scoped to **acute hospitals** — its title page reads “Cleaning Manual — Acute Hospitals”.
- It is from **2006** and has been superseded on frequency by NCG 30 (2023).
- The same document gives a *second, different* figure elsewhere: its A–Z table says curtains “should be laundered at least 6 monthly and when visibly soiled.”

None of which makes quarterly cleaning wrong — many homes clean more often for good reasons, and NCG 30 contemplates local schedules. **Quarterly is a local decision to be justified, not a national rule to be cited.** If you set a more frequent interval, record why.

## 4 The checklist

Any item you cannot answer with a document is a gap in your evidence file, however clean the curtains actually are.

### Policy

- ☐ A written curtain and soft-furnishing cleaning schedule exists
- ☐ It states its frequencies and what they are based on
- ☐ It covers **both** window curtains and bed/privacy curtains
- ☐ It includes the **on-discharge trigger** for MDRO or infectious disease
- ☐ It says how outbreak escalation is triggered, and by whom
- ☐ A named person is responsible for it being followed
- ☐ It has a review date, and the review has happened

### Records — where most homes fall down

- ☐ A dated record exists for **every** area
- ☐ Each record names the method used and who carried it out
- ☐ Records cover the current *and previous* cycle, so a pattern is visible
- ☐ Unscheduled cleans are recorded too — soiling, spillage, post-infection
- ☐ Records are in the IPC file and producible without a search
- ☐ Evidence shows the procedure was **implemented**, not just written

### The fabric itself

- ☐ You know whether curtains are **inherently FR or topically treated** — topical treatments wash out over time, inherent ones do not
- ☐ The FR specification is recorded in the fire safety file (*Reg. 28(1)(a) requires "suitable bedding and furnishings"*)
- ☐ A spare set exists, or the method does not remove the curtain, so privacy is never absent
- ☐ Curtains beyond cleaning are on a replacement plan, not re-cleaned indefinitely

### Attention needed before the next scheduled clean

- ☐ Visible marking at hand height on the leading edge
- ☐ A musty smell when the heating comes on
- ☐ Watermarking or tidemarks at the hem
- ☐ Dust along the top of the heading or rail
- ☐ Any spillage, body fluid or food contact
- ☐ Discharge of a resident with an MDRO or infectious disease

## 5 Questions to ask any curtain cleaning contractor

Including the ones we would rather not be asked. A checklist containing only questions the author answers well is not a checklist.

- ☐ What exactly does your method do, and how wet does the fabric get?
- ☐ How long until the room is usable again? Get it in writing.
- ☐ What documentation do I get after every visit? **Ask to see a sample certificate before you book.**
- ☐ Are your technicians Garda vetted, and can you evidence it *today*? Vetting is granted to a specific organisation and is **not transferable** between employers.
- ☐ Is technician training in-house or externally certified? Both are legitimate — know which.
- ☐ What insurance, and to what limit? Ask for the certificate and the public liability figure.
- ☐ If you claim disinfection, what product and what registration number? Biocidal claims are regulated in Ireland.
- ☐ Will you preserve fire retardancy — and is that based on test data, or on avoiding aggressive laundering? The second is a fair answer; presenting it as the first is not.
- ☐ Will residents' privacy curtains ever be absent while you work?
- ☐ What happens if a stain does not come out? Any honest supplier will say some will not.
- ☐ Can you give me a nursing home reference I can actually call?

## 6 Why the interval matters

Three peer-reviewed studies worth knowing if you are deciding whether the national minimum is enough:

- **Nursing homes specifically.** Across six nursing homes, 1,521 privacy curtain samples: **22% carried multidrug-resistant organisms**, and 40% of residents had a contaminated curtain at some point. *Gibson K et al., Infection Control & Hospital Epidemiology, 2021.*
- **Freshly laundered curtains do not stay clean.** Ten newly laundered curtains tracked over 21 days: by day 14, **87.5% tested positive for MRSA.** *Shek K et al., American Journal of Infection Control, 2018.*
- **In-place cleaning works, and the benefit decays.** A randomised controlled trial found cleaning curtains without removing them cut MRSA contamination from 64% to 5–10% — but burden climbed again over the following 3–4 days. *Cadogan K et al., Scientific Reports, 2021. This trial used hydrogen-peroxide spray and wipes, not our process; it supports the principle, not any commercial method.*

The interval, not the intensity, determines whether curtains are clean most of the time.

**Sources — check every one of them.** S.I. No. 415/2013 Reg. 27 & 9: [irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2013/si/415/made/en/print](http://irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2013/si/415/made/en/print) · National Clinical Guideline No. 30 (2023), Vol. 2 §7.1: [gov.ie/en/department-of-health/publications/infection-prevention-and-control-ipc/](http://gov.ie/en/department-of-health/publications/infection-prevention-and-control-ipc/) · HSE National Cleaning Standards Manual Appendices (2006), App. 5 El. 40 — archived at [web.archive.org/web/20231008135806/https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/publications/hospitals/hse-national-cleaning-standards-manual-appendices.pdf](http://web.archive.org/web/20231008135806/https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/publications/hospitals/hse-national-cleaning-standards-manual-appendices.pdf) · HIQA National Standards for IPC in Community Services (2018) and for the Prevention and Control of HCAs (2017): [hiqa.ie](http://hiqa.ie) · Gibson 2021 PMC9045556 · Shek 2018 PMID 29655669 · Cadogan 2021 PMC8575993.

### Want this filled in for your home?

Working through the checklist usually surfaces the same thing: the cleaning is happening, but the inventory and dated records are not there to prove it. We will audit **one wing free of charge** and give you the completed document — what curtains you have, their fabric and condition, the risk band of each area, and a proposed schedule referenced to NCG 30. It goes in your IPC file whether or not you ever become a customer.

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