The safe decontamination of toys between use is an essential requirement of routine infection prevention and control practice. Although toys may appear to be physically dirty after use, the bacteria isolated from their surfaces are generally non-pathogenic to children with normal immune function and probably no worse than other objects in the environment. However, there is an appreciable (1 in 10) risk of cross-infection with the use of toys in a clinic (McKay and Gillespie 2000).

Toys with hard surfaces are preferred as these are less likely to be contaminated and are more easily cleaned and must be stored in a designated container that is rigid and washable. The schedule will also assist in the identification of damaged toys or those that cannot be easily cleaned.

Toys and play equipment must be decontaminated thoroughly according to the risk of infection (Health Protection Agency 2010). Hard surface toys/play equipment should be cleaned routinely with neutral detergent and warm water and dried thoroughly. Alternatively, detergent wipes may be used. If disinfection is required then the use of an antimicrobial disinfectant wipe will be necessary. Cleaning must always precede disinfection (refer to the Cleaning and Decontamination of the Environment and Patient Equipment procedure for further guidance).

Soft toys, including dolls clothes and bean bag covers, must be laundered in a washing machine according to manufactures instructions. Heat labile items should be washed on the hottest cycle possible for that item.

The checklist is designed to provide assurance that cleaning has been carried out in accordance with the necessary requirements. The healthcare professional in charge is responsible for ensuring the checklist is completed and that he/she is satisfied with the standard of cleanliness.

**Schedule:**

- All hard toys and equipment must be cleaned weekly and also during use if they become soiled or contaminated.
- All soft toys, including dolls clothes and bean bag covers, must be cleaned monthly or earlier if they become soiled or contaminated.
- Plastic storage containers must be cleaned weekly and thoroughly dried.
- Sandpits should be covered for protection and the sand must be sieved monthly and replaced every three months. If the sand becomes contaminated or soiled it must be replaced immediately.
- Containers for water play must be emptied daily and thoroughly cleaned and dried.
- Water play toys should be non-porous and dried thoroughly after use and stored dry.
- Play dough/plasticine should be changed on a monthly basis or earlier if it becomes soiled or contaminated.

If play equipment is contaminated with blood or body fluids staff must refer to the policy for the management of blood and body fluid spillages.

References:


Health Protection Agency (2010). Guidance on infection control in schools and other childcare settings.