

Coronavirus waste: disposal of face masks

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Overview

In light of the increased use of surgical face masks worn for additional protection against Coronavirus (COVID-19), the following document explains how to dispose of these items.

Disposal of surgical face masks

- Equipment worn for additional protection against Coronavirus (COVID-19) such as face masks and gloves can be disposed of in the normal general/ black bin waste. This approach is aligned to guidance from Public Health (England, Scotland & Wales) and has been confirmed with regulators (the Environment Agency, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency & Natural Resources Wales).
- If preferred locally, colleagues can continue to double-bag these waste items, label the bags*, and store in a suitable and secure place for 72 hours before collection as general/ black bin waste.
- Face masks are not recyclable so should not go in recycling waste.
- If the double-bagging, labelling and storage for 72 hour disposal method is chosen locally, this waste should be disposed where possible in usual general/ black bin waste streams. If additional bins are needed for storage, these should be ordered through waste contractors.

Where there is a confirmed or suspected case of COVID-19:

- Any single-use equipment that is associated with a known or suspected case of COVID-19 should be double-bagged, labelled*, and stored for 72 hours before disposal as general/ black bin waste.
- Where storage for 72 hours is not possible or appropriate, this waste should be removed as Category B Infectious Waste. Note: due to existing pressures on Clinical Waste handling facilities, please only dispose as infectious waste as a last resort.

* Pre-printed labels are available to order from istore or RCOS. Labels should contain the date, time and name of the individual who has stored the waste.