



# Sustainable products in Care Services

**Group Clinical**  
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# Introduction

Our health is affected by the environment in which we live, and the way in which we deliver modern healthcare impacts our environment through **emissions, pollution, and waste**. To meet the health needs of the present without compromising the health of **future generations**, we must embrace **sustainable healthcare** – the highest quality care, with the lowest possible environmental impact.



As part of Bupa's wider sustainability strategy, one of our ambitions is to identify **circular solutions for non-hazardous waste** across all our markets. To achieve this, we must reuse resources and minimise waste.

**Single-use items** are widely used in care services, and whilst many of these are vital for the safe and effective delivery of care, there is an opportunity to replace some single-use items with a more sustainable alternative.

The accompanying list contains a list of potential items that can be **switched to reusable** products and related information on the cleaning of those items.

Replacing certain items may not be appropriate or practical for every home, so **choose the initiatives that are relevant** and feasible for your workplace. The 'suggested alternatives' are meant as examples – suppliers will vary country to country and this is just an example of what the alternative may look like/cost.

Some reusable items are more expensive than single use, but because they can be used many times, they are **often more cost effective** in the long-term.

**Dr Anne Lepetit**  
**Chief Medical Officer, Bupa**

## Did you know?

- Eliminating single-use items or switching to reusables where possible, alongside optimising decontamination processes and waste segregation and recycling, could reduce each product's **carbon footprint by 33%**.



## Staff

Reusable alternative available	Suggested alternative/product example	Cleaning process	Supporting information
Apron	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">Reusable apron</a></li> </ul>	Laundered	Aprons can be wiped between patient contacts. They need to be laundered between days outside of decon or per use in decon. <sup>1</sup>
Scrubs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">Reusable scrubs</a></li> </ul>	Laundered	In <a href="#">one study</a> , in 4 years only 15 reusable scrubs per employee are required compared with 940 disposable suits. <sup>2</sup>

## Equipment

Reusable alternative available	Suggested alternative/product example	Cleaning process	Supporting information
Blood pressure cuff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">Reusable blood pressure cuff</a></li> </ul>	<a href="#">Low-level disinfection</a> between patients	There is <a href="#">no data</a> that reusable blood pressure cuffs increase infection risk versus disposable cuffs.
Disinfectant wipes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">Paper towel</a> and <a href="#">DiffX spray</a></li> </ul>	Clinical waste	<a href="#">The WHO</a> Standard Precautions in Health Care: “Use adequate procedures for the routine cleaning and disinfection of environmental and other frequently touched surfaces.”
Medication spoon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">Reusable medication spoon</a></li> </ul>	Disinfection/sterilisation	Liquid medicines must be measured using a 5ml medicine spoon, oral syringe or medicine measuring cup.
Medicine pots	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">Reusable medicine pots</a></li> </ul>	Disinfection/sterilisation	NHS Scotland <a href="#">case study</a> ; there were no known infections recorded from the routine reuse of medicine cups.
Pulse oximetry sensors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">Reusable oximetry sensor</a></li> <li><a href="#">Remanufactured pulse oximetry sensor</a></li> </ul>	Low-level disinfection between patients/remanufacturing	By switching to reusables, one US hospital reduced the average cost of pulse oximetry readings by 56%.
Sharps bin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">SharpSmart</a></li> </ul>	Send back to supplier for cleaning	<a href="#">The ShartSmart system</a> reduces sharps injuries by up to 87%. <sup>3</sup>
Silicone tourniquets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">Reusable silicone tourniquet</a></li> </ul>	Disinfection	NHS <a href="#">case study</a> .

## Future opportunities

To the right is a list of items that are often disposable/single-use but have been identified as having potential to be reusable but as yet alternatives are not available, or no case studies have been found. If you are able, ask your supplier if they are able to procure reusable alternatives – ideally they would provide a lifecycle assessment for the reusable item, so we can verify that the reusable option is less impactful on the planet.

### Reusable alternative not yet available

- Gloves
- Cotton wool/gauze
- Plasters
- Modesty covers
- Syringes
- Waste bags
- Nutritional supplement bottles

## References

Reusable alternative available	Additional information
<sup>1</sup> Apron	<p>The <a href="#">Revolution Zero apron</a> is able to be decontaminated at least 75 times, is CE marked EN13795, is alcohol and water resistant, and the fabric is 99.4% polyester and 0.6% carbon that is optimised for repurposing or recycling at end of life.</p> <p>Aprons can be wiped between patient contacts. They need to be laundered at the end of a day's use.</p>
<sup>2</sup> Scrubs	<p>The <a href="#">NHS National standards of healthcare cleanliness 2021</a> guideline states that the couch should be cleaned between patient use, regardless of whether they have a paper cover or not.</p>
<sup>3</sup> Sharps bin	<p>The <a href="#">SharpSmart system</a> reduces sharps injuries by up to 87%, reduces sharps waste by 20%, and has a 33% environmental impact reduction compared to single-use plastic sharps bins.</p>