



Sustainable products in Health Clinics

Group Clinical
December 2024



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 health 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 clinic, 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"> • Reusable apron 	Laundered	Aprons can be wiped between patient contacts. ¹

Equipment

Reusable alternative available	Suggested alternative/product example	Cleaning process	Supporting information
Blood pressure cuff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reusable blood pressure cuff 	Low-level disinfection between patients.	There are no data that reusable blood pressure cuffs increase infection risk versus disposable cuffs.
Couch roll	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wipe down couch instead 	Disinfection	Nuffield Health case study. ²
Disinfectant wipes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paper towel and DiffX spray 	Clinical waste	The WHO Standard Precautions in Health Care: “Use adequate procedures for the routine cleaning and disinfection of environmental and other frequently touched surfaces.”
Kidney dish	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reusable kidney dish 	Autoclavable	As recommended by the Royal College of Surgeons Intercollegiate Green Theatre Checklist .
Pulse oximetry sensors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reusable oximetry sensor • Remanufactured pulse oximetry sensor 	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"> • SharpSmart 	Send back to supplier for cleaning	The SharpSmart system reduces sharps injuries by up to 87%. ³
Silicone tourniquets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reusable silicone tourniquet 	Disinfection	NHS England case study .
Speculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reusable metal speculum 	Autoclave/ High-level disinfection	The WHO Decontamination and reprocessing of medical devices for health care facilities guide states that speculums are suitable for reuse. ⁴
Tongue depressors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reusable tongue depressor 	Autoclavable	Metal tongue depressors must be manufactured following Good Manufacturing Practices (GMPs) as they are designed to be reused.

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
- Vacutainers
- Cotton wool/gauze
- Plasters
- Electrodes
- Ophthalmoscope covers
- Modesty covers
- Pregnancy tests
- Urine pots

References

Reusable alternative available	Additional information
¹ Apron	<p>The Revolution Zero apron 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 between days outside of decon or per use in decon.</p>
² Couch roll	<p>The NHS National standards of healthcare cleanliness 2021 guideline states that the couch should be cleaned between patient use, regardless of whether they have a paper cover or not.</p>
³ Sharps bin	<p>The SharpSmart system 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>
⁴ Speculum	<p>Another alternative is this single use speculum made of 100% sugarcane.</p>