

Go Green, Cut the Paper: Eliminating Exam Table Paper

The elimination of the exam table paper is a simple yet impactful **Planetary Health and Sustainability Action** initiative with multiple potential benefits. By discontinuing exam table paper, we would decrease waste, decrease the pre-consumer environmental impact from paper production, save on the cost of purchasing and disposal, and potentially improve infection control practices.

Why eliminate exam table paper?

Environmental Impact: LHSC uses over 350 kilometers of exam table paper every year. Removing exam table paper significantly reduces waste and decreases the environmental footprint associated with paper production and disposal.

Cost Savings: Eliminating paper will save the hospital money - approximately \$13,500 annually.

Infection Control: Current infection control guidelines require disinfection of tables between patients regardless of covering, making the paper redundant especially as the paper does not cover the high-contact edges of the tables.

Proven Success: Other hospitals, like CHEO and Ottawa academic hospitals, have successfully eliminated exam table paper. Reports from a partner hospital (publications pending) demonstrated paper-covering removal was supported by patients and did not affect patient safety perceptions by staff & patients.

How to do it safely

Effective Cleaning: Per IPAC guidelines, the exam tables should be disinfected after each patient, using hospital-approved disinfectants with fast contact times (1- or 3-minute) for efficient room turnover.

Education & Training: Discuss the initiative with your department staff and see if there are any significant barriers to implementation. Post the provided educational patient flyers by the exam tables.

Feedback & Improvements: Consider implementing a system to signal if an exam table was unused or used during a visit to avoid unnecessary cleaning. Work with your staff to improve the system and share your best practices with others.

Consider the Application: Some clinics are not good candidates for removing all coverings and will continue to use blue pads and towels for relevant exams or procedures. If you do need to continue using exam table paper, note that it can be put in our single-stream recycling blue bins if you're not doing that already.

Your role

Stay Informed: Understand the reasons and benefits behind this change.

Adapt Practices: Adjust to the new cleaning protocols and help in identifying any areas for improvement.

Provide Feedback: Share your experiences and suggestions to make this transition smooth for everyone.

Please reach out to LHSCGreenTeam@lhsc.on.ca with any comments or questions.

Together, we can make a difference for our planet and patients!

References

1. [End of the roll for examination table paper?](#) by Dr. Eugenie Waters in the Official Journal of the College of Family Physicians of Canada.
2. Public Health Ontario: [Best Practices for Environmental Cleaning for Prevention and Control of Infection in All Health Care Settings.](#)
3. [Planetary Health for Primary Care](#) toolkit by Dr. Ilona Hale & co. See Appendix 6 (page 40).
4. The Canadian Coalition for Green Health Care's [Green Office Toolkit](#) (section 3.3.1 page 11).