



Department of County Human Services  
**MULTNOMAH COUNTY OREGON**  
Mental Health and Addiction Services Division

421 SW Oak Street, Suite 520  
Portland, Oregon 97204-1817  
Phone: 503-988-5464  
Fax: 503-988-5870  
TDD: 503-988-3598

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TO: Administrators and Staff of all Multnomah County Mental Health Residential Facilities and Homes

FROM: Kathy Shumate, M.S., Supervisor – Residential Services, Mental Health and Addiction Services Division.

RE: Resident Room Searches

The purpose of this memo is to provide guidelines related to maintaining health and safety in our Residential Programs. Oregon Administrative Rules specify that residential services will be provided in a safe, secure and homelike environment while recognizing each resident's dignity, individuality and right to self-determination. Residential programs are charged with the care, supervision and protection of adults with mental or emotional disorders. Care, supervision and protection mean that residents will receive needed assistance with daily activities, daily observation and monitoring and protection by necessary actions to prevent abuse or exploitation, prevent self-destructive acts, and to safeguard residents' property and funds (OAR 309-035-115 (8)(32)(40); 309-035-0260 (8)(35)(45)).

There have been a number of incidents in recent weeks related to unsafe or unhealthy items in resident rooms. Items have included food, over-the-counter and prescription medications, alcohol and illegal drugs, cleaning chemicals and supplies and weapons. In most cases items were found during resident room cleaning or room searches and there were no negative outcomes. In some cases there have been critical incidents related to these items that have caused harm to residents and in some cases have involved significant police intervention. Police interventions have included use of less-lethal weapons such as tazers and have had the potential for use of deadly force. This is a reminder to all that safety can never be taken for granted. It is imperative that every effort be maintained to prevent as much as possible any and all incidents that could result in death or serious harm to residents or staff in your programs.

The responsibility of protecting residents and providing safe and healthy living environments requires persistent diligence on the part of all staff at all levels of residential care. Please review this memo and these guidelines with all staff at your programs. If you have questions or concerns related to room cleaning or room searches please contact the Residential Specialist for your facility.

## Guidelines for Room Cleaning and Room Searches

At all times residential program staff should be observing the environment and removing any items from any areas (including resident rooms) that are unsafe, unsanitary or otherwise against house rules. Items may include but are not limited to:

- Food or cooking supplies in resident rooms
- Any over-the-counter or prescription medications
- Craft supplies such as glues, paints, solvents, x-acto knives, etc.
- Cleaning supplies or chemicals
- Bio-hazardous waste
- Any sharp objects – syringes, knives, razors, broken glass, etc.
- Alcohol or street drugs or paraphernalia
- Candles, incense, etc.
- Weapons – knives, blades, firearms (real or replica), clubs, martial arts supplies, ropes, chains, etc.

All staff on all shifts should be observing residents throughout the residential environment. Maintaining presence and contact with residents in the home can have a tremendous impact on the health and safety of the home.

- Know how your residents are doing
- Notice any changes in symptoms or mood – report to administrator and treatment providers
- Be aware of conflicts or potential conflicts between residents
- Give reminders to residents who may inadvertently carry food, craft supplies, medications or other items to their rooms
- When in resident rooms for any reason observe and remove any items that you may see that are not to be in the room.
- Respectfully explain to residents why the items cannot be kept in rooms and offer a safe place to keep the items (when possible) for resident use later.

All resident rooms are to have a **“deep cleaning”** a minimum of one time per week. Residential programs are expected to do this cleaning or oversee and assure that residents have done so. During weekly room cleanings there is an enhanced opportunity to observe for unsafe items and remove them from the room. **“Deep Cleaning”** expectations:

- Linens changed (observe for items under mattresses)
- Laundry piles/hampers picked up, sorted, laundry completed
- Drawers and closets opened, organized, folded, etc.
- All surfaces dusted, wiped down
- Floors swept/vacuumed – including underneath beds/furniture
- Trash emptied

**Room Searches** are to be conducted at random intervals – avoiding any predictable pattern or frequency. Procedures and frequency of room searches should be delineated in the program's Safety Program (OAR 309-035-0130 (13)). The residential plan of care may specify how often room searches should be done for each individual based on each individual's history and needs for harm reduction and risk planning. Frequency of room searches should be increased whenever an individual:

- Displays increased symptoms of their illness
- Makes statements related to thoughts of harming themselves or others
- Or you receive information that an individual may have weapons, drugs, or other unsafe objects in their possession.

When conducting a room search observe any areas that may potentially hide unsafe items. Searching the room includes but is not limited to:

- Opening drawers and looking through/under drawer contents
- Searching piles of clothes or areas of amassed clutter
- Looking underneath mattresses and beds
- Looking in closets
- Checking pockets of clothing, in shoes, etc.
- Looking in boxes, storage containers
- Checking a resident's secure lock box or locked drawers

**Please remember to report any and all findings on an incident report form.**