Cleaning and Disinfecting for COVID-19

Introduction

This tip sheet provides cleaning and disinfecting guidance to employers and workers. Cleaning and disinfecting are different activities that work together to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission. They provide additional protection when layered with other COVID-19 prevention practices.

The employer must do everything practicable to protect the health and safety of their workers. In all cases, the requirements of your jurisdictional public health authorities and occupational health and safety regulators must be followed.

Also refer to COVID-19 information and guidance from CCOHS and the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), including:

- Sanitation and Infection Control for Cleaning Staff (CCOHS)
- Standard Operating Procedure: Disinfection of Touch Points (CCOHS)
- COVID-19: Cleaning and disinfecting (PHAC)
- Hard-surface disinfectants and hand sanitizers (COVID-19) (PHAC)
- Use household chemicals safely (PHAC)

COVID-19 and Surfaces

COVID-19 spreads when an infected person speaks, coughs, sneezes, shouts, or sings and releases respiratory droplets and aerosols that contain the virus that causes COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2). These respiratory droplets can land on and contaminate surfaces. Spit or nasal discharge can also contaminate surfaces, for example if an infected person sneezes into their hand or wipes their nose, and then touches a surface with unwashed hands.

COVID-19 may then spread to others when anther person touches a virus-contaminated surface, and then touch their mouth, nose, or eyes (mucous membranes) with unwashed hands.

How long the COVID-19 virus remains infectious on surfaces and objects can vary from a few hours to days, depending on the type of surface and environmental factors such as temperature and humidity.

Touching contaminated high-touch surfaces and using shared objects can increase the risk of COVID-19 transmission in the workplace, so it is important for employers to protect their workers and others by developing a cleaning and disinfecting program.

Develop a Cleaning and Disinfecting Program

- Include cleaning and disinfecting in your workplace's COVID-19 safety plan.

- Perform a risk assessment before implementing new cleaning and disinfecting procedures or updating existing ones. Avoid creating new hazards.

- Develop a written procedure for reference and training.

- Create a schedule for cleaning and disinfecting before, during, and after the workday.

- Record the cleaning and disinfecting activities (e.g., checklist, digital record). File and save the completed records.

- Make sure the program includes shared areas such as kitchens, washrooms, break rooms, reception areas, meeting rooms, congregate housing, elevators, and vehicles.

- Identify and list the frequently touched (high-touch) surfaces and shared objects in your workplace that are most likely to be contaminated, such as:

  - Light switches, door handles, control buttons, counters and tabletops, chairs, railings, payment devices, automated teller machines (ATMs), vending machines, touchscreens, keyboards and mice, phones, pens or pencils, faucets, taps, flush levers, sanitizer dispensers, water bottle refill stations, and protective barriers.

- High-touch surfaces and shared objects should be cleaned and disinfected more often than lower risk ones, as well as when visibly dirty, or between users.

- Clean and disinfect work areas before and after external contractors complete their work.

- Consider how to effectively clean and disinfect soft furnishings and objects such as cushions, soft toys, clothing, bedding, magazines, newspapers, and books. Reduce the use of soft-surfaced objects as much as possible.

- In the event a worker or client becomes sick in the workplace, make sure you have a specific cleaning and disinfecting protocol for any surfaces or objects they may have contacted.

Provide Supplies

- Provide adequate cleaning and disinfecting supplies and make sure they are accessible.

- Inspect soap, hand sanitizer, and paper towel dispensers. Make sure they are functional and resupplied as needed.

- Make sure that requirements for supplying personal protective equipment (PPE) are met. Who pays for PPE varies by jurisdiction.

- When working with chemicals, workers should wear appropriate gloves, eye protection such as goggles or a face shield, an apron, and suitable footwear. In some cases, respiratory protection may be required. Refer to the product manufacturer's instructions or safety data sheet for details.

- Replace garbage bins with no-touch or foot-activated receptacles.

- Line garbage cans with bags for safe and convenient disposal of contaminated items, such as used PPE, tissues, and cleaning materials.

Train and Educate

Provide workers with training and education on:

- How COVID-19 spreads.

- Cleaning and disinfecting procedures and your workplace's COVID-19 safety plan.

- The importance of following the product manufacturer's instructions or safety data sheet to make sure the product cleans or disinfects effectively.

- Chemical safety:

  - Ventilation of the work area (i.e., good air flow and air exchange rate)

  - Safe handling and disposal

  - Safe product storage, such as keeping containers away from ignition sources and incompatible chemicals

  - Appropriate PPE for the product being used

- How to properly wear, remove, work with, inspect, and care for PPE (if workers are required to wear it), and to understand its limitations.

- When and how to perform hand hygiene, such as before and after cleaning or wearing PPE.

- Other health and safety training requirements for your jurisdiction, such as understanding the Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS) and safety data sheets for any hazardous products that workers are expected to use.

Clean Before Disinfecting

Cleaning is the act of removing debris and residues from dirty surfaces and objects. It does not necessarily destroy the COVID-19 virus but can remove some during the cleaning process.

- Clean visibly dirty surfaces before disinfecting. Dirt can physically block disinfectants from reaching the virus and may contain materials that make disinfectants less effective.

CCOHS
Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety

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- There are many ways to clean:
    - Hot or cold water (wetting, soaking, jet spray, laundry agitation, flushing)
    - Cleaning products (detergents, liquids, soaps, gels, powders)
    - Scrubbing or wiping (damp cloth, sponge, paper towel, mop)
    - Dry collection (dusting, sweeping)
    - Air (vacuum, high-pressure air stream)
    - Vibration (ultrasonic cavitation bath)

When selecting the appropriate cleaning method(s) for your workplace, consider the following:

- Damp cleaning methods (damp clean cloths and wet mops) are more effective at collecting and containing particles than dry methods (dusting and sweeping).
- Damp cleaning methods such as wiping are also less likely to distribute virus particles into the air and onto other surfaces.
- Replace dry cleaning methods with damp ones where possible.
- Cleaning tools such as brooms, compressed air wands, and pressure washers create air turbulence and particle sprays that could distribute viruses further. Avoid using these cleaning methods where possible unless no suitable alternatives are available.
- If using a vacuum unit that vents to the indoors, make sure the air filter is High Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) rated.

Disinfect

Disinfecting is the act of treating a surface or object to destroy or inactivate viruses and bacteria. Disinfection is recommended for frequently touched (high-touch) surfaces and shared objects.

- Choose the best way to disinfect:
    - Chemical disinfectants (liquid, spray, soak)
    - Diluted bleach solution
- Choose a disinfectant product with a drug identification number (DIN) on the label. This number means that it has been approved by Health Canada for use.
- Refer to Health Canada's list of hard surface disinfectants that are likely to be effective against COVID-19.
- Clean visible dirt from the surface before applying disinfectant.
- Follow the disinfectant label instructions. Use the recommended quantity and dilution. Many disinfectants require contact with the surface for a specified amount of time to be effective (e.g., 10 minutes).
- Allow the surface to air dry or wipe down after the recommended contact time.
- Follow the manufacturer's instructions for disinfecting high-touch electronics (e.g., touch screens, pin pads, keyboards, tablets, etc.). If liquids can be withstood, disinfect with alcohol or disinfectant wipes containing 70% alcohol.
- Some materials may be damaged by chemical treatment, in which case steam-sterilization (autoclave) may be a suitable alternative.
- Never use hard surface disinfectant products to sanitize your skin. Contact could be hazardous to your health (refer to the product's safety data sheet). Instead, use an approved alcohol-based hand sanitizer product.

Using bleach solution:

- If commercial disinfectant cleaning products are unavailable, hard surfaces can be disinfected using a 0.1% sodium hypochlorite (bleach) solution.
- This solution can easily be prepared by:
    - Mixing 5 millilitres (1 teaspoon) of household bleach (5% sodium hypochlorite) into 250 millilitres (1 cup) of water; or

- - Mixing 20 millilitres (4 teaspoons) household bleach into 1 litre (4 cups) of water.
- Follow safe procedures when working with bleach:
  - Always add bleach to water, not water to bleach.
  - Bleach solutions should be clearly labelled and used shortly after preparation. After 24 hours they lose their disinfectant properties.
  - Do not mix bleach with any other chemicals. Mixing bleach with vinegar, glass cleaners, ammonia, alcohol, and other chemicals can release toxic gases.
  - Bleach is corrosive. To prevent damage, test surfaces before using a bleach solution.
  - Never use bleach or diluted bleach on yourself or others.

Handle Used Materials Carefully

Used cleaning materials such as sponges or paper towels can contain residual chemicals or viruses, so handle them carefully:

- Perform hand hygiene after cleaning and disinfecting, and after handling used cleaning materials or garbage:
  - Wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds to remove any chemical residue or viruses that may have contacted the skin.
  - If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol.
- Use dedicated cleaning and disinfecting materials (towels, sponges, mops, etc.) that can be washed and dried completely or disposed of after each use.
- Store soiled reusable materials in a closed laundry bag or hamper.
- Wash reusable materials with regular laundry detergent and hot water (60-90°C).
- Put used disposable materials and PPE (e.g., paper towels, gloves) in a lined garbage bin.
- Seal liner bags before disposing of them with regular waste.
- Empty garbage at least daily. Use disposable gloves when handling garbage.
- Safely dispose of waste chemicals and empty containers. Some products can harm the environment. Follow the waste disposal laws in your local municipality.

If you or someone you know is in crisis, please contact your local hospital, call 911 immediately, or contact a Crisis Centre in your area.

It is important that mental health resources and support are provided to all workers, including access to an employee assistance program, if available.

For further information on COVID-19, refer to the Public Health Agency of Canada.

Note that this guidance is just some of the adjustments organizations can make during a pandemic. Adapt this list by adding your own good practices and policies to meet your organization's specific needs.

Disclaimer: As public and occupational health and safety information is changing rapidly, local public health authorities should be consulted for specific, regional guidance. This information is not intended to replace medical advice or legislated health and safety obligations. Although every effort is made to ensure the accuracy, currency and completeness of the information, CCOHS does not guarantee, warrant, represent or undertake that the information provided is correct, accurate or current. CCOHS is not liable for any loss, claim, or demand arising directly or indirectly from any use or reliance upon the information.