



COVID-19

Cleaning and disinfecting: Confronting COVID-19

Now, more than ever, during the COVID-19 pandemic, proper workplace cleaning and disinfecting is necessary to prevent the spread of the virus and protect workers and the public. Evidence suggests the COVID-19 virus may remain on surfaces from hours to days. Cleaning followed by disinfecting surfaces is a best practice measure for prevention.

Cleaning and disinfecting are two separate tasks. Cleaning removes dirt and impurities from surfaces. However, cleaning does not kill viruses like COVID-19. Disinfecting with the right chemicals on the other hand, kills viruses on surfaces, but does not clean surfaces. Accordingly, it is important to first clean surfaces and then disinfect surfaces.

Frequently touched surfaces should be cleaned at least twice per day and when dirt is visible. Frequently touched surfaces include: handles, counters, hand rails, touch screen surfaces, light switches, table tops, chairs, food contact surfaces, kitchen and serving utensils. Please note: These surfaces include cleaning carts and supplies themselves.



CLEANING HARD SURFACES

- ◆ Use a detergent or soap and water
- ◆ Wipe the surface, using friction (scrubbing), with a disposable or microfiber cloth (microfiber tends to be more effective at cleaning and disinfecting than terry or other types of cloths.)
- ◆ Ensure cloth stays clean by using a new cloth or fresh portion of the cloth for each area or surface. Once all cloth portions have been used, replace the cloth.

If using reusable cloths, such as microfiber cloths, it may be a good idea to colour code cloths (i.e., red — bathroom, green — frequently touched surfaces, blue – glass and reflective surfaces). Only one set of cloths should be used per room or area to avoid cross-contamination. Reusable cloths should be placed in a bag until they can be laundered.

DISINFECTING HARD SURFACES

Health Canada and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency have compiled lists of products that meet their requirements for disinfection of the virus that causes COVID-19. If the product you have is not on their lists, check the active ingredients on the product label or safety data sheet. Those containing 62-71% ethanol, 0.5% hydrogen peroxide or 0.1% sodium hypochlorite (bleach) are thought to kill the virus within one minute. For details see our resource sheet, entitled, [Evaluating disinfectants for use against the COVID-19 virus](#).

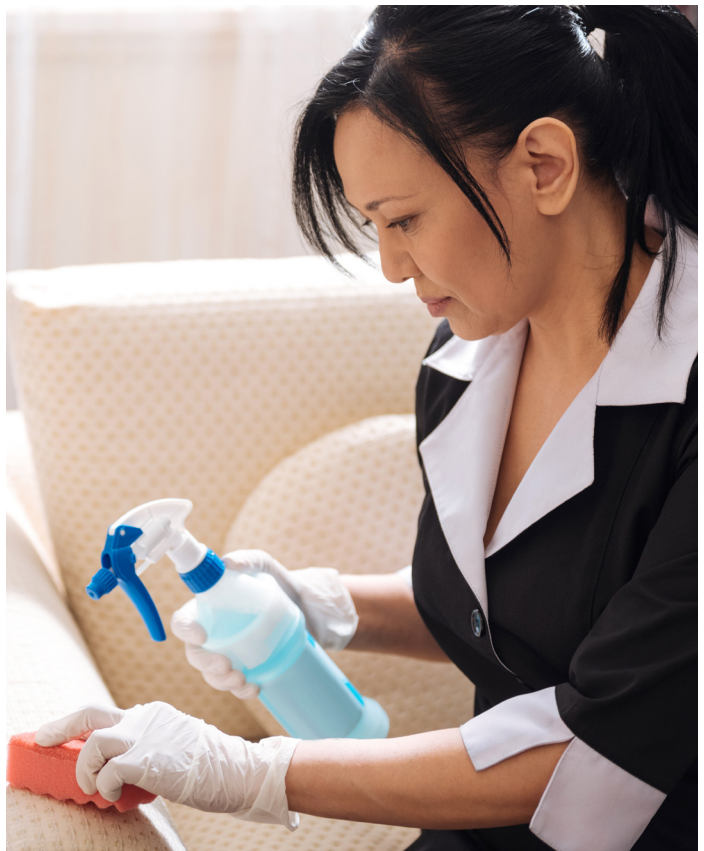
It is important to ensure products have not expired and to always follow manufacturer instructions (mixing certain products can create hazardous gases). Manufacturer instructions typically include: proper dilution, how to dispose and store product as well as precautionary statements that provide information on the product's hazards, how to prevent hazards from occurring and first aid. Of particular importance, manufacturer instructions should advise how long the product should remain on a surface in order to kill the virus, before wiping.

CLEANING AND DISINFECTING SOFT SURFACES

While hard surfaces, particularly those frequently touched are of most concern during the COVID-19 pandemic, soft surfaces should not be forgotten such as: linens, cushions, bedding, etc. Fabrics potentially contaminated with the virus should be washed in hot water with detergent and dried on the highest temperature setting available. For non-washable soft surfaces, such as carpets and furniture, a disinfectant spray may be applied.

WASTE

Cleaning also includes the frequent removal of waste, as discarded cloths, gloves, and tissues in wastebaskets may be infected with COVID-19. Wastebaskets should also be cleaned and disinfected or at the minimum, sprayed with a disinfectant as soon as they have been emptied. Laundry bags if re-used need to be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected too.



DISINFECTING WIPES

While disinfecting wipes can be highly effective at killing germs, caution must be exercised to ensure surfaces are cleaned first and wipes are used correctly. Using a disinfectant wipe on a surface that has not been cleaned may be doing more harm than good as you may only be spreading germs. Further, disinfectants must remain on a surface (i.e., surface must stay wet for four to ten minutes) to be effective. A quick swipe with a disinfecting wipe may not be effective. Always read and follow manufacturer's recommendations. Wipes containers indicate how long the surface must remain wet, to ensure germs are killed. Dry wipes are not effective and should be discarded. Wipes are useful when used in between regular cleaning on items touched frequently. Again be sure to check the Health Canada and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency list of products that meet their requirements for protection against COVID-19 and/or have a look at the active ingredients on the product label or SDS.

PRECAUTIONS, PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT AND HAND HYGIENE

Always read and follow manufacturer instructions and recommendations on all products. Do not touch your face, particularly eyes, nose or mouth while cleaning or disinfecting. Gloves and other appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (i.e. gowns, shoe covers, eye protection for splashes) should be worn wherever possible when cleaning, disinfecting and handling trash. [Gloves should be compatible with the products being used.](#) Gloves and other Personal Protective Equipment for cleaning should be [removed properly](#) to avoid contamination. It is imperative to wash your hands immediately after removing gloves. [Effective hand washing](#) requires the use of soap and water for at least 20 seconds.

FURTHER QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS?

Review our COVID 19 resources at www.whsc.on.ca.

Need more help?

Contact your worker member of the joint health and safety committee, worker representative, union representative if you have one, or Workers Health & Safety Centre at contactus@whsc.on.ca or 1-888-869-7950.



TO LEARN MORE

Check out other related [WHSC docs](#):

- ◆ Cleaners and Janitors: Confronting COVID-19
- ◆ Laundering Work Wear: Confronting COVID-19
- ◆ Evaluating Disinfectants for use against the COVID-19 Virus
- ◆ Gloves at Work: Safeguards for Workers Confronting COVID-19
- ◆ Respiratory and Eye Protection at Work: Safeguards for Workers Confronting COVID-19

