

COVID-19: Environmental cleaning in non-healthcare public settings

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This document provides guidance on cleaning and disinfecting to prevent the spread of novel coronavirus (COVID-19) in non-healthcare public settings such as homes, offices, schools (K-12), childcare centres, colleges and universities, transit, workplaces, and community- and faith-based organizations.

The COVID-19 pandemic is evolving rapidly. This guidance is subject to change. Please visit the Middlesex-London Health Unit website (<https://www.healthunit.com/news/novel-coronavirus>) regularly for updates and additional guidance.

Key messages

- Routine cleaning followed by disinfection is a best practice to prevent the spread of COVID-19.
- High-touch surfaces should be cleaned and disinfected twice per day and when visibly dirty.¹
- Commonly used cleaners and disinfectants are effective against COVID-19.¹
- Check the expiry date before using cleaners and disinfectants.¹
- Always follow the manufacturer's directions for use to ensure their effectiveness.

General recommendations for routine cleaning and disinfecting

- Facilities should follow their protocols for routine cleaning and disinfection.
- In addition to routine cleaning, high-touch surfaces should be cleaned and disinfected twice per day and when visibly dirty.¹ Examples of high-touch surfaces include doorknobs, hand rails, light switches, toilet handles, and faucet handles.
- High-touch electronic devices (e.g., tablets, computer keyboards, telephones) can be disinfected with 70% alcohol (e.g., disposable alcohol wipes).²
- Gloves should be worn when handling cleaning and disinfectant products.¹
- Pre-mixed commercial products should be used where possible.¹ Otherwise, prepare fresh solution according to the manufacturer's instructions.²
- Always follow the manufacturer's directions for use, especially the contact time required for the product to be effective.

Two-step process: Cleaning and disinfecting

Cleaning followed by disinfection is a best practice to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

1. Cleaning

- Cleaning breaks down grease and removes organic material (e.g., dirt, dust, microorganisms such as bacteria and viruses) from surfaces or objects.^{1,2} The cleaning process physically removes microorganisms from surfaces helping to lower the risk of spreading infection.³
- Cleaning products can be purchased on its own or combined with a disinfectant in one solution.¹

2. Disinfection

- Disinfection uses chemicals to kill microorganisms on surfaces or objects. For it to be effective, cleaning should first be done.²
- Disinfectants include [diluted household bleach solutions](#)⁴, alcohol solutions with at least 70% alcohol, and commercial products with an eight-digit Drug Identification Number (DIN). Disinfecting wipes should be discarded if they become dry, and are not recommended for heavily soiled areas.

Recommendations for routine cleaning and disinfecting in specific settings

To date, specific guidance has also been developed for schools and childcare programs, colleges and universities, and community- and faith-based organizations.

1. Schools (kindergarten to grade 12) and childcare programs

The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) has developed [guidance](#)³ on the prevention and management of COVID-19 in schools (K-12) and childcare programs.

- It is recommended that toys are routinely cleaned and disinfected as per standard procedures and to avoid toys that are difficult to clean such as plush toys.
- Mouthpieces on musical instruments should be cleaned and disinfected according to standard practices recommended for the instrument, especially when used by more than one student/child. When possible, each student/child should have their own mouthpiece.
- Water fountain mouthpieces should be regularly cleaned and disinfected according to the manufacturer's recommendations, or using the following steps: 1) Spray a disinfectant cleaning solution on the inside surfaces of the mouthpiece and protective guard. 2) Scrub the inside and outside of the mouthpiece/protective guard with a grout brush. 3) Rinse with water⁵. However, there is no evidence to suggest that water fountain mouthpieces are a major source of spread for viruses.

2. Colleges and universities

[Interim guidance from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)⁶ (CDC) recommends routine environmental cleaning at colleges and universities to prevent the spread of COVID-19 among students, faculty, and staff:

- It is recommended that disposable disinfectant wipes be provided so that commonly used surfaces (e.g., computer keyboards and mice, desks) can be wiped down by students, staff, and faculty before each use.

3. Community- and faith-based organizations

[Interim guidance from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)⁷ (CDC) recommends daily cleaning of high-touch objects and surfaces using regular soap or detergent and water, followed by disinfection, at community- and faith-based organizations.

References

1. Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion (Public Health Ontario). Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19): Cleaning and Disinfection for Public Settings [Internet]. 2020 [cited 2020 Mar 12]. Available from: <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/ncov/factsheet-covid-19-environmental-cleaning.pdf?la=en>
2. Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion (Public Health Ontario), Provincial Infectious Diseases Advisory Committee. Best practices for environmental cleaning for prevention and control of infections in all health care setting. 3rd Edition [Internet]. Toronto, ON: Queen's Printer for Ontario. 2018 [cited 2020 Mar 6]. Available from: <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/bp-environmental-cleaning.pdf?la=en>

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7. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Get your community- and faith-based organizations ready for coronavirus disease 2019: Interim guidance [Internet]. 2020 [cited 2020 Mar 9]. Available from: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/guidance-community-faith-organizations.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fcommunity%2Fguidance-community-faith-organizations.html

COVID-19: Decontamination in non-healthcare settings

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Extra precautions for cleaning and disinfecting should be taken if there has been a possible or confirmed case of novel coronavirus (COVID-19).

Public Health England has developed [guidance for decontaminating non-healthcare settings](#)¹ where a possible or confirmed case of COVID-19 has spent time in a space while showing symptoms. The guidance applies to settings such as workplaces, waiting rooms, hotel rooms, student accommodations, and boarding schools.

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1. Personal protective equipment (PPE)

- Disposable gloves and a gown should be worn for decontaminating an area where a possible or confirmed case of COVID-19 has been. Hands should be washed immediately after the gloves and gown are removed.
- Additional PPE such as a surgical mask or full-face visor should be considered if a higher level of contamination may be present (e.g., body fluids).

2. Cleaning and disinfecting

- Routine cleaning and disinfecting can be done in public areas where the symptomatic person has passed through and spent minimal time (e.g., hallways).
- All surfaces and objects a symptomatic person has come into contact with (e.g., bathrooms, door handles, electronic devices, desks, hand rails) must be cleaned and disinfected. Any cloths and mop heads used should be discarded immediately after use.
- Standard cleaning and disinfectant products can be used for cleaning and disinfection. Disinfectants include [diluted household bleach solutions](#)², alcohol solutions with at least 70% alcohol, and commercial products with an eight-digit Drug Identification Number (DIN).
- Items such as upholstered furniture and mattresses may be steam cleaned.

3. Laundry

- Disposable gloves should be worn when handling dirty laundry from a symptomatic person and discarded after each use. Be mindful to avoid shaking dirty laundry to minimize the possibility of dispersing the virus through the air.
- All exposed clothing, fabric curtains, beddings and other laundry items should be placed into a bag for laundering. Wash dirty laundry at the hottest temperature setting possible according to the fabric care instructions.

4. Waste disposal

- Disposable gloves should be worn when handling waste. Waste from the symptomatic person (e.g., tissues, face masks) and the decontamination process (e.g., disposable gloves, cloths, and mop heads) should be placed in a plastic bag, tied when full, and then double-bagged. Waste should be placed in a secure location until collection.

References

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