



A Union of Professionals

Cleaning Tips for Custodians

What We Know

Cleaning and disinfecting are part of a broad approach to preventing infectious diseases in schools. Infectious diseases are generally spread through harmful microorganisms or environmental pathogens, such as viruses, bacteria, fungi, etc., via direct person-to-person contact with an infected individual or by touching objects contaminated by infected individuals, such as doorknobs, elevator buttons, handrails and other frequently touched surfaces. These germs are then transmitted from the hands to the nose, mouth or eyes.

Effective cleaning and disinfecting of environmental surfaces, including “high touch” or frequently touched surfaces, significantly decreases the number of environmental pathogens on those surfaces, which in turn, reduces the risk of transmission and infection. These “frequency areas” and items known or likely to be contaminated should be disinfected at least daily.

Exactly how long the COVID-19 virus lives on hard surfaces is unknown at this time, but other corona viruses live up to several days on such surfaces. Therefore, we recommend taking protective measures when cleaning and disinfecting surfaces.

Cleaning and disinfection of frequently touched surfaces will be the main focus of building services personnel during a pandemic. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends cleaning frequently touched surfaces and commonly shared items at least daily and when visibly soiled. Here are the best practices:

The Difference between Cleaning and Disinfecting

Cleaning removes germs, dirt and impurities from surfaces or objects. Cleaning works by using soap (or detergent) and water to physically remove germs from surfaces. This process does not necessarily kill germs, but by removing them, it lowers their numbers and the risk of spreading infection.

Disinfecting kills germs on surfaces or objects. Disinfecting works by using chemicals to kill germs on surfaces or objects. This process does not clean dirty surfaces. By killing germs on a surface after cleaning, it lowers the risk of spreading infection.

Sanitizing lowers the number of germs on surfaces or objects to a safe level, as judged by public health standards or requirements. This process works by either cleaning or disinfecting surfaces or objects to lower the risk of spreading infection.

The **American Federation of Teachers** is a union of professionals that champions fairness; democracy; economic opportunity; and high-quality public education, healthcare and public services for our students, their families and our communities. We are committed to advancing these principles through community engagement, organizing, collective bargaining and political activism, and especially through the work our members do.

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Best Cleaning and Disinfecting Practices

Clean and disinfect surfaces and objects that are touched often.

Follow your school's standard procedures for routine cleaning and disinfecting. Typically, this means daily sanitizing of surfaces and objects that are touched often, such as desks, countertops, doorknobs, computer keyboards, hands-on learning items, faucet handles, phones and toys. Some schools may also require disinfecting these items every day. Standard procedures often call for disinfecting specific areas of the school, like restrooms.

Immediately clean surfaces and objects that are visibly soiled.

If surfaces or objects are soiled with body fluids or blood, use gloves and other standard precautions to avoid coming into contact with the fluid. Remove the spill, and then clean and disinfect the surface.

"Dwell time," or the time the disinfectant or bleach solution remains on a surface prior to wiping or rinsing, is important to how well it kills germs and viruses. Check the label for specific instructions for dwell time.

For example: bleach should be mixed with water in a 0.24 percent solution, which is 2/3 cup bleach per 1 gallon water. This bleach solution should be allowed to stand (or dwell) for five minutes prior to rinsing.

Keep routine cleaning and disinfecting practices in place.

Most viruses are relatively fragile, so standard cleaning and disinfecting practices are sufficient to remove or kill them. Special cleaning and disinfecting processes, including wiping down walls and ceilings, frequently using room air deodorizers and fumigating, are not necessary or recommended. These processes can irritate eyes, noses, throats and skin; aggravate asthma; and cause other serious side effects.

Clean and disinfect correctly.

Always follow label directions on cleaning products and disinfectants. Wash surfaces with a general household cleaner to remove germs. Rinse with water and follow with an Environmental Protection Agency-registered disinfectant to kill germs.

If a surface is not visibly dirty, you can clean it with an EPA-registered product that both cleans (removes germs) and disinfects (kills germs) instead. Be sure to read the label directions carefully, as there may be a separate procedure for using the product as a cleaner or as a disinfectant. Disinfection usually requires the product to remain on the surface for a certain period of time (e.g., letting it stand for three to five minutes).

Use disinfecting wipes on electronic items that are touched often, such as phones and computers. Pay close attention to the directions for using disinfecting wipes. It may be necessary to use more than one wipe to keep the surface wet for the stated length of contact time. Make sure that the electronics can withstand the use of liquids for cleaning and disinfecting.

When an EPA-registered disinfectant is called for, be sure to follow the label directions on the disinfectant for dwell time—the amount of time necessary for the disinfectant to reside on the surfaces. Also make sure the surface remains wet during the dwell time to properly disinfect and kill the germs.

Use products safely.

Pay close attention to hazard warnings and directions on product labels. Cleaning products and disinfectants often call for the use of gloves or eye protection. For example, gloves should always be worn to protect your hands when working with bleach solutions. Do not mix cleaners and disinfectants unless the labels indicate it is safe to do so. Combining certain products (such as chlorine bleach and ammonia cleaners) can result in serious injury or death.

Custodial staff, teachers and others who use cleaners and disinfectants must be trained to read and understand all instruction labels and understand safe and appropriate use. This might require that instructional materials and training be provided in other languages. Safety data sheets (SDS) should be obtained from the supplier or manufacturer prior to use of any new product.

Proper personal protective equipment (PPE) should be used as needed, to include eye and skin protection. The manufacturer's instructions and SDS are good places to find PPE recommendations.

Handle waste properly.

Follow your school's standard procedures for handling waste, which may include wearing gloves. Place no-touch waste baskets where they are easy to use. Throw disposable items used to clean surfaces and items in the trash immediately after use. Avoid touching used tissues and other waste when emptying wastebaskets. Wash your hands with soap and water after emptying wastebaskets and touching used tissues and similar waste.

Other General Disinfection/Cleaning Considerations

- Do not clean with dry dusting or sweeping because this may create aerosols. Use damp cleaning methods.
- Change mop heads, rags, and similar items and disinfectant solutions frequently during the decontamination procedure.
- Consider disposable cleaning items.
- Work from areas of light contamination to areas of heavier contamination.
- Use a double-bucket method (one bucket for cleaning solution, one for rinsing).
- Clean, disinfect and dry equipment used for cleaning after each use.
- Wash hands thoroughly after each work session.

Examples of Items That Need to be Specifically Disinfected During a Pandemic

1. Restrooms/Bathrooms:
 - a. Doorknobs or handles
 - b. Light switches and cover plates
 - c. Paper towel dispenser knobs or handles
 - d. Faucet handles
 - e. Toilet and urinal flush levers
 - f. Toilet and urinal partitions, doors (including knobs, levers or slides)
 - g. Other items identified locally
2. Lunchrooms/Cafeteria:
 - a. Refrigerator door handles
 - b. Microwave door handles and buttons/keypads
 - c. Table tops
 - d. Doorknobs or handles
 - e. Light switches and cover plates
 - f. Vending machine buttons
 - g. Drinking fountain
 - h. Other items identified locally
3. Locker room:
 - a. Doorknobs or handles
 - b. Light switches and cover plates
 - c. Other items identified locally
4. Classroom and office space:
 - a. Doorknobs or handles
 - b. Light switches and cover plates
 - c. Telephones
 - d. Other commonly touched items identified locally (e.g. keyboards, keypads, copiers, etc.)
5. Other locations:
 - a. Elevator call and operating buttons
 - b. Stairway handrails, doorknobs, light switches
 - c. Hallway doorknobs, handles, drinking fountain faucets
 - d. Vehicles' steering wheels, door handles, shift knobs, dashboard controls

Be sure to check out our COVID-19 toolkit for more information about the coronavirus and how to protect your workplaces and members. For additional information, contact Amy Bahruth with AFT Nurses and Health Professionals at 202-879-4731, Abahruth@aft.org.