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Guidance

COVID-19: cleaning in non-healthcare settings outside the home

Updated 16 October 2020

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Please note: this guidance is of a general nature. Employers should consider the specific conditions of individual places of work and comply with all applicable legislation, including the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974.

Background

The risk of coronavirus (COVID-19) infection depends on many factors, including:

- the type of surface contaminated
- the amount of virus shed from the individual
- the time the individual spent in the setting
- the time since the individual was last in the setting

COVID-19 spreads from person to person through small droplets, aerosols and through direct contact. Surfaces and belongings can also be contaminated with COVID-19 when people with the infection cough or sneeze or touch them. The risk of spread is greatest when people are close to each other, especially in poorly ventilated indoor spaces and when people spend a lot of time together in the same room.

Social distancing, washing your hands regularly, good respiratory hygiene (using and disposing of tissues), cleaning surfaces and keeping indoor spaces well ventilated are the most important ways to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

Increased frequency of cleaning of general room surfaces reduces the presence of the virus and the risk of contact.

The infection risk from a COVID-19 contaminated environment decreases over time. It is not yet clear at what point there is no risk from the virus, however, studies suggest that, in non-healthcare settings, the risk of residual infectious virus is likely to be significantly reduced after 48 hours.

In situations where someone has symptoms of COVID-19, we continue to advise storing personal waste for 72 hours as an additional precaution.

General principles of cleaning during the COVID-19 pandemic

This section provides general cleaning advice for non-healthcare settings where no one has symptoms of, or confirmed COVID-19. For guidance on cleaning where there has been an person with symptoms of, or confirmed COVID-19, please refer to the section on principles of cleaning after a case has left the setting or area.

There is also additional guidance for employers and businesses on working safely during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Cleaning and disinfection

Regular cleaning plays a vital role in limiting the transmission of COVID-19.

Reducing clutter and removing difficult to clean items can make cleaning easier. Increase the frequency of cleaning, using standard cleaning products such as detergents and bleach, paying attention to all surfaces but especially ones that are touched frequently, such as door handles, light switches, work surfaces, remote controls and electronic devices.

As a minimum, frequently touched surfaces should be wiped down twice a day, and one of these should be at the beginning or the end of the working day. Cleaning should be more frequent depending on the number of people using the space, whether they are entering and exiting the setting and access to handwashing and hand-sanitising facilities. Cleaning of frequently touched surfaces is particularly important in bathrooms and communal kitchens.

When cleaning surfaces, it is not necessary to wear personal protective equipment (PPE) or clothing over and above what would usually be used.

Laundry

Items should be washed in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. There is no additional washing requirement above what would normally be carried out.

Kitchens and communal canteens

It is very unlikely that COVID-19 is transmitted through food. However, as a matter of good hygiene practice (<https://www.food.gov.uk/business-hygiene>), anyone handling food should wash their hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds before doing so. Crockery and eating utensils should not be shared. Clean frequently touched surfaces regularly.

Food business operators should continue to follow the Food Standard Agency's (FSA) guidance on good hygiene practices in food preparation (<https://www.food.gov.uk/business-guidance/industry-guides-to-good-food-hygiene>), Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (<https://www.food.gov.uk/business-guidance/hazard-analysis-and-critical-control-point-haccp>) (HACCP) processes, and preventative practices (pre-requisite programmes (PRPs)).

Bathrooms

Clean frequently touched surfaces regularly. Ensure suitable hand washing facilities are available including running water, liquid soap and paper towels or hand driers. Where cloth towels are used, these should be for individual use and laundered in accordance with washing instructions.

Waste

Waste does not need to be segregated unless an individual in the setting shows symptoms of or tests positive for COVID-19.

Dispose of routine waste as normal, placing any used cloths or wipes in 'black bag' waste bins. You do not need to put them in an extra bag or store them for a time before throwing them away.

Principles of cleaning after an individual with symptoms of, or confirmed, COVID-19 has left the setting or area

Personal protective equipment (PPE)

The minimum PPE to be worn for cleaning an area after a person with symptoms of COVID-19, or confirmed COVID-19, has left the setting, is disposable gloves and an apron. Wash hands with soap and water for 20 seconds after all PPE has been removed.

If a risk assessment of the setting indicates that a higher level of virus may be present (for example, where someone unwell has spent the night such as in a hotel room or boarding school dormitory) then additional PPE to protect the cleaner's eyes, mouth and nose may be necessary. The local

Public Health England (PHE) Health Protection Team (<https://www.gov.uk/health-protection-team>) can advise on this.

Cleaning and disinfection

Public areas where a symptomatic person has passed through and spent minimal time but which are not visibly contaminated with body fluids, such as corridors, can be cleaned thoroughly as normal.

All surfaces that the symptomatic person has come into contact with should be cleaned and disinfected, including all potentially contaminated and frequently touched areas such as bathrooms, door handles, telephones, grab rails in corridors and stairwells

Use disposable cloths or paper roll and disposable mop heads, to clean all hard surfaces, floors, chairs, door handles and sanitary fittings – think one site, one wipe, in one direction.

Use one of the options below:

- a combined detergent disinfectant solution at a dilution of 1,000 parts per million available chlorine (ppm av.cl.)

or

- a household detergent followed by disinfection (1000 ppm av.cl.). Follow manufacturer's instructions for dilution, application and contact times for all detergents and disinfectants

or

- if an alternative disinfectant is used within the organisation ensure that it is effective against enveloped viruses

Avoid mixing cleaning products together as this can create toxic fumes. Avoid creating splashes and spray when cleaning.

Any cloths and mop heads used must be disposed of and should be put into waste bags as outlined below.

When items cannot be cleaned using detergents or laundered, for example, upholstered furniture and mattresses, steam cleaning should be used.

Laundry

Wash items in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. Use the warmest water setting and dry items completely. Dirty laundry that has been in contact with an unwell person can be washed with other people's items. To minimise the possibility of dispersing virus through the air, do not shake dirty laundry prior to washing.

Clean and disinfect anything used for transporting laundry with your usual products, in line with the cleaning guidance above.

Waste

Personal waste from individuals with symptoms of COVID-19 and waste from cleaning of areas where they have been (including PPE, disposable cloths and used tissues):

1. Should be put in a plastic rubbish bag and tied when full
2. The plastic bag should then be placed in a second bin bag and tied
3. This should be put in a suitable and secure place and marked for storage until the individual's test results are known

This waste should be stored safely and kept away from children. It should not be placed in communal waste areas until negative test results are known, or the waste has been stored for at least 72 hours.

If the individual tests negative, this can be disposed of immediately with the normal waste.

If COVID-19 is confirmed this waste should be stored for at least 72 hours before disposal with normal waste.

If during an emergency you need to remove the waste before 72 hours, it must be treated as Category B infectious waste. You must:

- keep it separate from your other waste
- arrange for collection by a specialist contractor as hazardous waste

There will be a charge for this service.

Other household waste can be disposed of as normal.

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