



# FAQs – CLEANING TO PREVENT THE SPREAD OF COVID-19 IN YOUR WORKPLACE

**COVID-19 spreads through respiratory droplets. These are produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. A person can acquire the virus by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it, and then touching their own mouth, nose or eyes.**

**A key way you can protect your workers and others from the risk of exposure to COVID-19 is by implementing appropriate cleaning and disinfecting measures for your workplace.**

**The following information has been sourced from Safe Work Australia guidance material and the state and federal Department of Health.**

## WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CLEANING AND DISINFECTING?

**Cleaning** means to physically remove germs (bacteria and viruses), dirt and grime from surfaces using a detergent and water solution. A detergent is designed to break up oil and grease with the use of water. Anything labelled as 'detergent' will work.

**Disinfecting** means using chemicals to kill germs on surfaces. It's important to clean before disinfecting because dirt and grime can reduce the ability of disinfectants to kill germs. Disinfectants containing 70 per cent alcohol or more, quaternary ammonium compounds, chlorine bleach or oxygen bleach are suitable for use on hard surfaces (that is, surfaces where any spilt liquid pools, and does not soak in). These will be labelled as 'disinfectant' on the packaging.

## HOW DO I CLEAN AND DISINFECT?

Cleaning should start with the cleanest surface first, progressively to the dirtiest surface. When surfaces are cleaned, they should be left as dry as possible to reduce the risk of slips and falls, as well as spreading of viruses and bacteria through droplets.

Disinfectant may not kill the virus if the surface has not been cleaned with a detergent first. The packaging or manufacturer's instructions will outline the correct way to use disinfectant. Disinfectants require time to be effective at killing viruses. If no time is specified, the disinfectant should be left for ten minutes before removing.

Alternatively, you may be able to do a 2-in-1 clean and disinfect by using a combined detergent and disinfectant.

You should provide your workers with suitable cleaning and disinfecting products and personal protective equipment (PPE), and ensure they are trained on how to use them.

## WHAT SHOULD MY WORKERS WEAR TO CLEAN/ DISINFECT?

In most circumstances, it will not be necessary for workers to wear protective clothing to clean/ disinfect your workplace. However, workers should use personal protective equipment (PPE) that is necessary for the products they are using. As a starting point:

- Gloves are the minimum requirements
- Surgical - masks should be used if cleaning an area impacted by a suspected or confirmed COVID-19 case
- Gowns and disposable suits are not required, clothes that can be washed afterwards are suitable.

You need to provide necessary PPE and train your workers on how to use it safely.

## HOW OFTEN SHOULD I CLEAN AND DISINFECT?

Workplaces should be cleaned and disinfected at least once per day.

Regular cleaning is key to minimising the build-up of dust and dirt and allows for effective disinfecting when required.

Cleaning should be more frequent if surfaces become visibly unhygienic, there is a spill, or if they are touched by many people. For example, if your workplace has a high volume of workers, customers or visitors that are likely to touch surfaces such as EFTPOS machines, hoist/ lift buttons, hand rails and door handles, then more regular cleaning is required.

If your workplace has many workers, customers or visitors entering each day, more frequent cleaning and disinfecting is recommended. If your workplace is only attended by the same, small work crew each day and involves little interaction with other people, routine disinfection, in addition to daily cleaning, may not be needed.

If your workplace operates in shifts, it should be cleaned between shifts. If equipment is shared between workers, it may also be cleaned between uses, where practicable.

## DOES EVERY SURFACE NEED TO BE CLEANED?

You don't need to clean/ disinfect every surface. You only need to clean surfaces that are touched. This is true whether the touching is deliberate (e.g. a door knob) or incidental (e.g. brushing a door when reaching for the door knob). There are some surfaces that are never touched (e.g. ceilings and cracks and crevices in machinery) and these do not need to be cleaned and disinfected.



# FAQs – CLEANING TO PREVENT THE SPREAD OF COVID-19 IN YOUR WORKPLACE

## WHICH AREAS SHOULD I PRIORITISE FOR CLEANING?

Any surfaces that are frequently touched (touched more than once per day) should be prioritised for cleaning and disinfection. These include tabletops, door handles, handrails, hoists and lifts, light switches, desks, toilets, taps, kitchen surfaces and cupboard handles.

Any surfaces that are visibly unhygienic, or have a spill, should be cleaned as soon as they are identified, regardless of when they were last cleaned.

## DO I NEED TO CLEAN AREAS OR EQUIPMENT DAILY IF NO-ONE HAS ENTERED THE AREA, OR USED THE EQUIPMENT RECENTLY?

Research suggests that the virus can survive on soft, porous surfaces (such as cardboard and fabrics) for up to 24 hours. It can survive on hard surfaces (such as plastic and stainless steel) for up to 72 hours (three days). Any areas which have not had recent human contact, that is within the past few days, are unlikely to be a potential source of infection. You should consider this when deciding whether an area or equipment needs to be cleaned and disinfected.

## DO I NEED TO CLEAN WORKERS' PERSONAL ITEMS?

You should instruct your workers to clean/disinfect personal items used in the workplace such as glasses and phones regularly using disinfectant sprays or wipes/detergent.

## WHAT IF THERE IS A CASE OF COVID-19 IN MY WORKPLACE?

If you have a case of COVID-19 in the workplace, the Queensland Department on Health (13 HEALTH) can provide you with advice on what you need to do in your workplace. Follow their instructions.

Your workplace will need to be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected before people can return to the workplace.

The following is not required when cleaning:

- Using an ISO accredited cleaner is not required
- Fogging is not required and is not recommended by the Australian Government Department of Health for routine cleaning against COVID-19
- Swabbing surfaces following disinfection is not required
- Having a qualified hygienist present during cleaning is not required.

## WHAT ARE THE BEST PRODUCTS FOR CLEANING AND DISINFECTING?

When cleaning, it is best to use detergent and warm water. This will break down grease and grime so that the surface can be wiped clean. Anything labelled as a detergent will work.

Disinfectants that contain 70 per cent or more alcohol, quaternary ammonium compounds, chlorine bleach or oxygen bleach are suitable for use on hard surfaces (that is, surfaces where any spilt liquid pools and does not soak in). These will be labelled as 'disinfectant' on the packaging.

If using a store-bought disinfectant, choose one that has antiviral activity, meaning it can kill viruses. This should be written on its label. Alternately, diluted bleach can be used. If using a freshly made bleach solution, follow the manufacturer's instructions for appropriate dilution and use. It will only be effective when diluted to the appropriate concentration. Prediluted bleach solutions lose effectiveness over time and on exposure to sunlight, so it is important to make up a solution as needed, rather than storing it.

## IF EVERYTHING IS SOLD OUT, CAN I MAKE MY OWN DISINFECTANT?

Store-bought disinfectants meet government standards, so you know they will work. However, if you don't have store bought disinfectant available, you can prepare a disinfecting solution using bleach and water. Do not use products such as vinegar, baking soda, essential oil, mouthwash, or saline solution – these will not kill COVID-19.

If preparing a disinfecting solution, make sure you handle chemicals carefully, as they can be dangerous. Always read and follow the instructions and safety directions on the label. If the solution is not prepared and used as described in the instructions, it is unlikely to be effective.

## SHOULD I BE USING HOSPITAL GRADE DISINFECTANT FOR NORMAL CLEANING IN THE WORKPLACE?

No. The Department of Health only recommends using hospital grade disinfectant when cleaning in a hospital or healthcare setting if an infectious patient has been present.

Household or commercial grade disinfectant are suitable for use in workplaces that are not health care settings.

## CAN I USE A PRODUCT THAT CLAIMS TO BE CLEANER AND DISINFECT AT THE SAME TIME?

Yes. Some products can be used for both cleaning and disinfecting, which can save time and effort. If using these products, make sure that you read and follow the instructions on the label to ensure they work effectively.

## IS A SANITISER A SUITABLE DISINFECTANT?

A sanitiser is a chemical that is designed to kill some bacteria and some viruses that can cause disease in humans or animals. These chemicals are not as strong as disinfectants, which makes them safe to use on skin. If you're disinfecting a hard surface or inanimate object, a disinfectant is the best option.

## IS AN ANTIBACTERIAL A SUITABLE CLEANER/DISINFECTANT?

Antibacterial products are designed to kill bacteria. However, COVID-19 is caused by a virus rather than by bacteria, so an antibacterial product is not suitable.



# FAQs – CLEANING TO PREVENT THE SPREAD OF COVID-19 IN YOUR WORKPLACE

## I PREFER TO USE ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY OR NATURAL PRODUCTS, DO I HAVE TO USE DETERGENT TO CLEAN?

Yes. Using only water and a cloth, or other forms of cleaning agents, such as vinegar and bicarbonate of soda, will not be as effective as using detergent or disinfectant.

## DOES HEATING OR FREEZING KILL THE VIRUS?

Extreme heat will destroy COVID-19, but is not recommended as a general disinfection method. Steam and boiling water can easily burn workers and should only be used by trained personnel with specialised equipment.

Viruses are generally resistant to the cold and can survive longer if frozen than if left outside at room temperature.

## ARE THERE ANY CLEANING METHODS I SHOULDN'T USE?

You should avoid any cleaning methods that may disperse the virus or create droplets, such as using pressurised water, pressurised air (including canned air cleaners), dry cloth and dusters.

## WHAT IS DISINFECTANT FOGGING, AND DO I NEED TO DO IT?

Disinfectant fogging (sometimes called disinfectant fumigation) is a chemical application method where very fine droplets of disinfectant are sprayed throughout a room in a fog. The disinfectant must reach a specific concentration for a certain length of time to be effective.

Disinfectant fogging is not recommended for general use against COVID-19 and can introduce new work health and safety risks. Physically cleaning surfaces with detergent and warm water, followed by disinfecting with liquid disinfectant, is the best approach. If you are looking for a faster or easier method, consider a combined (2-in-1) cleaning and disinfecting agent.

The chemicals used in fogging solutions also introduce work health and safety risks which must be managed. Chlorine and hydrogen peroxide-based products are highly irritating to the skin and eyes. Alcohol based products are highly flammable, which may lead to fire or explosion if an ignition source is present.

In all cases, sufficient time must be allowed following fogging for the chemicals to disperse. This will ensure workers returning to the area are not exposed to hazardous chemicals. If fogging is carried out, it must only be performed by trained persons and using appropriate controls in accordance with the manufacturer's directions. It should not be done as a response to, or an element of a response to an area contaminated with COVID-19.

## HOW DO I CLEAN LINEN, CLOTHING, CROCKERY AND CUTLERY?

If items can be laundered, launder them in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions using the warmest setting possible. Dry items completely. Do not shake dirty laundry as this may disperse the virus through the air.

Wash crockery and cutlery in a dishwasher on the highest setting possible. If a dishwasher is not available, hand wash in hot soapy water.

## WHAT ELSE CAN I DO TO KEEP MY WORKPLACE CLEAN?

- Minimise touching of surfaces, put up signs and support your workers in reminding customers
- Reduce the number of touch points for workers, this may include propping open doors to avoid needing to use the handle
- Provide hand washing facilities or hand sanitiser at entry and exit points if possible.

For more detailed information about cleaning and disinfecting specific surfaces go to SWA cleaning guide:

<https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/doc/how-clean-and-disinfect-your-workplace-covid-19>