

COVID-19 health and safety

Cleaning and disinfecting

The virus that causes COVID-19 is easily destroyed by mild soap and water. This works well for handwashing, but cleaning surfaces effectively can be a challenge. That's why it's important to clean and disinfect surfaces, especially high-contact surfaces, which are surfaces that are contacted frequently and/or by many people.

How COVID-19 spreads

COVID-19 is an infectious disease that mainly spreads among humans through direct contact with an infected person and their respiratory droplets. Respiratory droplets are generated by breathing, speaking, coughing, and sneezing. Your exposure risk is greatest when you have prolonged close contact with an infected person.

The virus can also spread if you touch a contaminated surface and then touch your eyes, mouth, or nose. A surface can become contaminated if droplets land on it or if someone touches it with contaminated hands.

Cleaning and disinfecting

Effective cleaning and disinfection involves a two-stage process.

Cleaning

To disinfect a surface effectively, you must clean it first to remove surface dirt and debris. Any residue left on work surfaces and equipment may deactivate the disinfectant. Use soap or detergent as a cleaning agent.

Disinfection

After cleaning, apply a disinfectant to the surface. You need to leave the disinfectant on for a specified contact time to neutralize any remaining organisms. Look for recommended contact times on product instructions.

What surfaces you should clean and disinfect

Start by cleaning and disinfecting all the common surfaces that workers and customers touch. Examples include doorknobs, light switches, handles, countertops, desks, tables, phones, keyboards, touch screens, toilets, faucets, gas pump handles, and ATM machines.

Conduct a survey of your workplace to determine if there are other surfaces that workers, customers, or children touch regularly. A workplace where the public can come and go will need a more thorough assessment and plan than a small shop where there are normally just a few workers.

Clean and disinfect common high-contact surfaces inside and outside to limit the chance of the virus spreading through touching contaminated surfaces.

What you can use to clean and disinfect

For cleaning, you can use regular soap and water or another cleaning solution. Depending on how many people are in the space and how it's used, you may need to clean some spaces more frequently.

There are a number of products you can use for disinfection. Health Canada has a [list of disinfectants for use against COVID-19](#). They all have an assigned drug identification number. These are consumer products that don't require a safety data sheet, like some controlled products you may be familiar with. However, it's still important to follow whatever safety information is available for the product. Use these products with caution, as directed on the label, to avoid introducing other hazards into your workplace.

One of the most common disinfectant solutions is water and bleach. You can make a 500 ppm bleach solution by adding 42 mL (3 tablespoons) of bleach to 4 L (1 gallon) of water. For other quantities, use this [bleach calculator](#). Never mix bleach with other disinfecting products. This can result in dangerous fumes. For more information, visit the BC Centre for Disease Control's [Cleaning and Disinfecting](#) webpage.

Some sanitizing solutions contain up to 70 percent alcohol and will release flammable vapours. Use these with caution, and don't use them if there are ignition sources nearby.

Make a plan for cleaning and disinfecting your workplace

Ask the following questions when making your plan:

- What surfaces and objects are workers likely to touch? Do they share any tools or equipment?
- What cleaning materials and supplies will you need? Buy a reasonable supply.
- How often will you need to clean? Clean at least once a day for most surfaces and at least twice a day for high-contact surfaces. Consider how many workers are in the space; whether customers, children, or other members of the public are in the space; how long they're in the space; and how they use the space.
- When is the best time to clean? Consider cleaning before or after shifts, or before opening or after closing. Allow enough time for a thorough cleaning. Time the cleaning so it limits worker and customer exposure to cleaning and disinfecting odours.
- Who will do the cleaning? You may need to limit the number of cleaners and ensure they have time to clean effectively. Make sure workers who are cleaning have been trained to use the cleaning products safely.
- What personal protective equipment (PPE) will the cleaners need to protect against the cleaning chemicals?

There may be some machinery or equipment in your workplace that isn't used often. To reduce the amount of cleaning you have to do, consider cleaning these items and then boxing them or covering them with plastic drop sheets or tarps until you need them.

Handwashing

Regular handwashing is an important part of maintaining clean surfaces. Establish handwashing procedures and communicate them to workers. Establish policies to ensure that workers are washing their hands regularly: at a minimum, when they arrive, immediately before any breaks, and just before leaving. This may be the most important infection control for your workplace.

Ensure workers have access to handwashing facilities. If none are available, set up handwashing stations or provide alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

Let's all do our part

When workplaces in British Columbia are healthy and safe, they contribute to a safe and healthy province. As COVID-19 restrictions are lifted and more businesses resume operations, let's all do our part. For more information and resources on workplace health and safety, visit worksafebc.com.