Safe Cleaning and Disinfection Guidance for Public Spaces

This guidance describes safe cleaning and disinfection practices for businesses, parks and other public spaces to ensure cleanliness and safety. Find safe operating guidance for food service, schools, and child cares on the DOH Resources and Recommendations website.

To control the spread of COVID-19 everyone must exercise the following important preventative measures to protect others and themselves: stay home when sick, wash your hands often, do not touch your face, wear a cloth face covering in public, and maintain a physical distance of at least 6-feet away from others. Anyone who in close contact (within 6 feet for 15 minutes or more) with someone diagnosed with COVID-19 needs to self-quarantine for 14 days.

In addition to physical distancing, cloth face coverings, and hand washing, reduce the risk of exposure to COVID-19 by cleaning and disinfecting our workplaces and homes safely.

**Personal hygiene**

Wash hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Soap kills the virus that causes COVID-19.

- Wash hands after going to the bathroom, before eating, and after coughing, sneezing, and nose blowing.
- Provide plain fragrance-free/dye-free liquid/foaming soap. Fragrances irritate about a third of people. Do not use “antimicrobial” soaps. They are not effective against COVID-19, are not necessary, and are not good for human health or the environment.
- If soap and water are not available, use a fragrance-free/dye-free hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.

**Cleaning and disinfection**

*Cleaning* refers to the removal of dirt and impurities, including germs, from surfaces using soap or detergent. Cleaning alone does not kill germs, but thorough cleaning will significantly decrease their numbers and lower the risk of spreading infection. *Sanitizing* reduces germs on surfaces to levels that are safe. *Disinfecting* kills germs on surfaces.

Establish a schedule for cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched surfaces, service counters, bathrooms, and athletic areas based on their use. Commercial kitchens, medical facilities, and
childcare facilities need to follow their specific regulations for appropriate cleaning, sanitizing, and disinfection.

**How to clean and disinfect**

- Sanitizers and disinfectants do not work if the surface has organic matter or dirt.
- Clean with soap, water, and a microfiber cloth to remove most microorganisms.
  - Consider using “green” cleaners with third party certification (Green Seal, EPA Fragrance-free Safer Choice) which are better for health and indoor air quality.
  - Launder or vacuum soft and porous surfaces. These items are difficult to disinfect and do not usually need to be. If they are frequently touched, consider removing or replacing with easily cleanable items.

- Sanitizers and disinfectants must be EPA registered anti-microbial pesticides. If they are not EPA registered, they are not an appropriate product. For COVID-19, choose a disinfectant approved by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and registered for use against the SARS-CoV-2 virus.
  - When possible, chose safer fragrance-free disinfectants and sanitizers. Hydrogen peroxide or alcohol-based products are safer for human health and do not cause asthma. For guidance on choosing safer disinfectants:
    - [EPA’s Design for the Environment Antimicrobial Pesticide (Safer Disinfectants) Program](#)
    - California Department of Public Health’s [Cleaning for Asthma-Safe Schools Guidance](#)
    - The University of Washington’s [Safer Cleaning, Sanitizing and Disinfecting Strategies to Reduce and Prevent COVID-19 Transmission](#)
    - [Safer Disinfectants on EPA’s List of Recommended Antimicrobial Products for Use Against Novel Human Coronavirus, Responsible Purchasing Network](#)
  - When EPA-approved disinfectants are not available, other disinfectants can be used:
    - 70% isopropyl alcohol
    - 1/3 cup 6% bleach added to 1 gallon of water with a 1 minute wet contact time
    - Bleach is not a cleaner and bleach solutions for sanitizing and disinfecting are only to be used on cleaned and rinsed surfaces. When mixing bleach from concentrate, an emergency eyewash and good ventilation are required.
    - Do not mix bleach or other cleaning and disinfection products together. This can cause very dangerous fumes.
    - Quaternary ammonia products and bleach can cause asthma.
  - All facilities must have a Safety Data Sheet (SDS) for each chemical used.

- Apply disinfectants to high touch surfaces.
  - Always read the label of the product and follow its instructions, including application method, before using the product.
It is a violation of law to use a registered pesticide in a manner inconsistent with its labeling. Applying products using a different method than the label calls for could affect the efficacy and safety of the product.

- Use the proper concentration of disinfectant.
- The disinfectant must stay wet on the surface for the time required by the label in order to kill organisms.
- Follow the product label’s hazard warnings and instructions for personal protective equipment (PPE) such as gloves, eye protection, and ventilation.
- Use disinfectants in a well-ventilated space. As much as possible, disinfect surfaces when workers and visitors are not present. Thoroughly air out the area before occupants return.
- Do not use fogging, fumigation, or wide-area spraying to control the spread of COVID-19. These methods are not effective, do not clean contaminated surfaces, and are hazardous to human health.

Guidance for specific areas and surfaces. Frequency will depend on use.

Clean and disinfect elevator buttons, door handles, push bars, automatic door buttons, and other high-touch surfaces routinely. Cleaning and disinfect high touch areas four times per day, depending on use.

**Shared restrooms**

Thoroughly clean and disinfect restrooms, including all high touch areas such as door handles, flush buttons or levers, counters, sink and shower handles, and light switches. Keep restrooms stocked with soap and paper towels. At remote locations without running water, provide alcohol-based sanitizers. Clean and disinfect high use restrooms twice a day if possible. At remote restrooms that cannot be cleaned and disinfected regularly, post signs to that effect and remind people to wash their hands thoroughly. Ensure exhaust ventilation systems are running continuously and as much fresh air is coming in as possible. If safe, keep windows open to increase ventilation.

**Public drinking fountains and bottle fillers**

Clean and disinfect the button or lever. Public drinking water supplies are safe. Clean and disinfect surfaces and buttons. Consider posting signage that includes:

- Do not place your mouth on the spout of the fountain or allow your water bottle to contact the nozzle when refilling.
- Allow water to flow for 10 seconds to allow fresh, clean water to come through prior to drinking.
- If the fountain has a button or lever, clean before and after use, or use your elbow. Wash or sanitize your hands after use.

**Keyboards and other sensitive electronics**

Use alcohol wipes or spray 70% isopropyl alcohol into a cloth to wipe electronics. Use a separate area of the cloth for each device. Wash and dry cloths after use. Wash hands before
and after use of electronics and do not touch your face while using. Do not share items if you do not need to.

**Athletic equipment**

Thoroughly clean and disinfect all surfaces that may contact skin at least daily and between use by different people. Surfaces (including mats) must be intact, without rips and tears, to be cleanable. Have separate cleaning mops and buckets for athletic areas.

**Buses**

Close seating on buses makes person-to-person transmission of respiratory viruses more likely. Reduce the number of riders to maintain a physical distance of 6-feet between riders and encourage riders to wear cloth face coverings. Keep windows open to reduce virus transmission, including airing out the bus between routes. Clean seats and rails with soap, water, and microfiber cloths. Disinfect handrails with an EPA approved disinfectant.

**Playgrounds**

Do not spray disinfectants on outdoor playgrounds. Clean if needed. Require children to wash their hands with soap and water when they come inside or prior to eating or drinking.

Face-to-face respiratory droplet transmission of children playing close together is the primary concern for virus transmission. Encourage children to maintain a physical distance of 6-feet from other children they do not live with.

**Children’s toys**

Wash soft or porous children’s toys in the highest water temperature appropriate for the item and dry completely.

Clean hard plastic toys thoroughly. In general, thorough cleaning with soap and water is all that is necessary. Disinfectants can be harmful to children, especially if small children put them in their mouths. Select chemicals carefully and consider:

- Is it corrosive?
- Is it a skin, eye, or respiratory irritant?
- Does it leave a residue?
- Is it toxic by skin absorption, ingestion, or inhalation?

**Soft (porous) surfaces**

Surfaces such as carpeted floor, rugs, and drapes require only routine cleaning appropriate for the surface. Follow manufacturer’s instructions to launder items. Use the warmest water possible and dry completely.

To clean carpets use truck-mounted hot water/steam extraction. Spot treat as needed first. Use the minimum amount necessary of low-odor and low-sudsing carpet shampoo. Thoroughly remove cleaner and dirt. The water should run clean. Carpet should dry thoroughly within 24 to 48 hours to prevent mold and bacterial growth.
Ventilation systems

There is no special cleaning or disinfection recommended for heating, ventilation, air conditioning (HVAC) systems. If the HVAC system uses a cooling tower, ensure proper maintenance prior to reopening after extended closures. For more information about cooling towers and HVAC systems see: the Cooling Technology Institute and New York State’s Department of Health webpage.

Ventilation is an important part of maintaining good indoor air quality and reducing transmission of respiratory diseases. Ventilate with as much outside air as possible before, during and after occupancy, and while cleaning and disinfecting. Open windows when possible. Upgrade to MERV 13 filters where feasible. Filters must fit tightly. Two-inch pleats provide greater filtration with less pressure drop.

Cleaning and disinfecting an area after a person with confirmed or suspected COVID-19 has been in a facility

If it has been more than 7 days since the sick person visited or used the facility, additional cleaning and disinfection is not necessary. If it has been less than 7 days:

- Open windows and doors in the building if it is safe and use ventilation fans to increase air circulation.
- Wait 24 hours, or as long as possible, prior to cleaning and disinfecting the area.
- Clean and disinfect all areas used by the ill person. This includes offices, bathrooms, common areas, shared electronic equipment like tablets, touch screens, keyboards, remote controls, and ATMs.
- Vacuum the space if necessary using a vacuum equipped with a high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter, if available. Do not vacuum when people are present.
- Area can be re-opened after the proper disinfecting is complete.

Additional cleaning and disinfection guidance

EPA/CDC Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfecting Public Spaces, Workplaces, Businesses, Schools, and Homes

CDC: Reopening Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfecting Public Spaces, Workplaces, Businesses, Schools, and Homes

CDC: Interim Guidance for Administrators of US K-12 Schools and Child Care Programs

CDC: Cleaning and Disinfection for Community Facilities

More COVID-19 Information and Resources

Stay up-to-date on the current COVID-19 situation in Washington, Governor Inslee’s proclamations, symptoms, how it spreads, and how and when people should get tested. See our Frequently Asked Questions for more information.
The risk of COVID-19 is not connected to race, ethnicity or nationality. Stigma will not help to fight the illness. Share accurate information with others to keep rumors and misinformation from spreading.

- WA State Department of Health 2019 Novel Coronavirus Outbreak (COVID-19)
- WA State Coronavirus Response (COVID-19)
- Find Your Local Health Department or District
- CDC Coronavirus (COVID-19)
- Stigma Reduction Resources

Have more questions about COVID-19? Call our hotline: 1-800-525-0127. For interpretative services, press # when they answer and say your language. (Open from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m.) For questions about your own health, COVID-19 testing, or testing results, please contact your health care provider.

To request this document in another format, call 1-800-525-0127. Deaf or hard of hearing customers, please call 711 (Washington Relay) or email civil.rights@doh.wa.gov.