

RiskTopic

Cleaning and disinfection plans during COVID-19 outbreak

Coronavirus spreads from person to person primarily through droplets in the air when someone coughs or sneezes. But scientists have determined that the virus can spread from a surface to a person. Developing an effective cleaning and disinfection program is a critical component to prevent the spread of the coronavirus in the workplace.

Introduction

Workers can be infected by contacting contaminated surfaces or objects and then touching their eyes, nose or mouth. Below is a list of surface times for novel coronavirus (from the New England Journal of Medicine):

- **In the air:** Up to 3 hours
- **On copper:** Up to 4 hours
- **On cardboard:** Up to 24 hours
- **On plastic:** 2 to 3 days
- **On stainless steel:** 2 to 3 days

Proper cleaning and disinfection of surfaces can help minimise the spread of the virus. Whether you have in-house janitorial staff or a contract cleaning service, it is important to have a comprehensive cleaning plan to help ensure all parties understand their responsibilities.

Discussion

For employers who have already planned for pandemics, planning for COVID-19 may involve updating plans to address the specific exposure risks, sources of exposure, routes of transmission, and other unique characteristics of the virus. Planning is a critical component to a cleaning and disinfection program. The plan should address four important components:

- Areas to be cleaned/disinfected
- Frequency of cleaning
- Cleaning/disinfection materials that will be used
- Material specific cleaning procedures and techniques

Each cleaning/disinfection material has specific procedures to optimise its effectiveness. These materials' specific procedures should be integrated into the routine cleaning and disinfection plan. To ensure it is followed, the cleaning and disinfection plan should be clearly documented and communicated to all interested parties.

Guidance considerations

Areas to be cleaned: Guidance from the Australian Government Department of Health indicates what routine cleaning should be appropriate for most areas, and what frequently used items (such as those listed below) may need cleaning several times each day:

- Doorknobs & handrails
- Elevator buttons
- Light switches
- Tap handles
- Publicly used telephones
- Computer monitors, mice and keyboards
- Countertops and conference tables
- Cafeteria tables, coffee pots and vending equipment

Cleaning frequency: The use of regular cleaning and disinfection materials should be enough in many instances. The cleaning frequency for each area should be covered specifically in the plan and match the significance of the cleaning and disinfection task. For example, the cleaning plan for a hospital emergency room would be different from that of an office or retail occupancy. For more frequent cleaning, you may wish to provide disinfecting wipes to employees and have them available in shared spaces such as conference rooms, group workspaces and in the cafeteria.

Cleaning procedures: For personal safety, it is important that all cleaning staff or cleaning service providers receive training on proper use of any chemicals, cleaning agents and cleaning equipment. As appropriate, additional training should be provided on the use of appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) such as gloves, hearing protection and goggles. Training should also include specific processes, requirements for each area cleaned and how to address the increased cleaning needed.

For cleaning of critical areas in regulated facilities such as hospital and food processing facilities, check with industry associations or local health departments about the need for validation of cleaning protocol for effectiveness.

Cleaning chemicals and disinfectants: Influenza viruses can be inactivated by many low- or intermediate-level disinfectants e.g. Disinfectants containing $\geq 70\%$ 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). For guidance, refer to *Safe Work Australia - Cleaning to prevent the spread of COVID-19*.

Contracted services: Service level agreements are important for both the facility and the cleaning service. The agreements help avoid any potential misunderstanding and disputes about responsibilities and expectations for each party. A written service level agreement should include, at a minimum, the four key areas described earlier: areas to be cleaned/disinfected, frequency of cleaning, materials to be used and any material-specific cleaning procedures and techniques. Additional items should be added to the contract to address any specific situations as they apply to your facility. Legal counsel should review the terms and conditions of any service level agreement.

Other considerations: Adherence to good personal hygiene, proper hand hygiene, respiratory hygiene, and cough etiquette is especially important to help prevent the spread in the workplace and community. Additional cleaning during flu season needs to focus on targeted use of disinfection for surfaces touched frequently by hand:

- Keep housekeeping surfaces and countertops clean of visible soil by cleaning with detergents and water or proprietary cleaners, followed by rinsing with water.
- Follow label instructions carefully when using disinfectants and cleaners, noting any hazard advisories and indications for PPE (such as protective gloves). Do not mix disinfectants and cleaners unless the labels indicate it is safe to do so. Combining certain products (such as chlorine bleach and ammonia cleaners) can be harmful, potentially resulting in serious injury or even death.
- Clean and disinfect all bathroom surfaces on a regular basis using registered detergent/disinfectants. Alternatively, clean surfaces first with detergent and water and then disinfect with a registered disinfectant in accordance with manufacturer instructions.
- Wipe frequently touched electronic items (e.g. remote controls, handheld devices) with hand sanitizer cloths.

Conclusion

Cleaning and disinfection plans can be a critical part of minimising the spread of virus during an outbreak. The plan should outline areas to be cleaned/disinfected, frequency of cleaning, materials to be used and any material-specific cleaning procedures and techniques. Training should be provided to all staff (employed or contracted) involved. These cleaning procedures/requirements should be clearly documented and understood in any agreements developed. The use of proper materials, techniques and clear cleaning plans can support a facility's outbreak-response efforts. Additional information can be found in the Australian Government Department of Health document - *Environmental cleaning and disinfection principles for COVID-19*.

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