



Information about cleaning and disinfection for schools

14 February 2022

COVID-19 has reinforced the importance of ensuring schools have in place appropriate infection prevention and control (IPC) procedures, along with cleaning and hygiene measures.

This document provides guidance on cleaning and disinfection for schools to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and other infectious diseases. The recommendations in this document were developed by the Infection Control Expert Group and have been endorsed by the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC).

For further advice on IPC during the COVID-19 pandemic, see the [Department of Health](#) website.

Cleaning following a confirmed COVID-19 case

Regular cleaning before or after school hours, day cleaning and enhanced cleaning continue to be important routine practice for IPC and provide a more than sufficient layer of protection in schools for students and staff.

Schools must notify their cleaning service provider following a confirmed COVID-19 case. Routine COVID safe cleaning should be performed. The school's routine daily clean (whole of school clean, including cleaning and disinfection of frequently touched surfaces), will be sufficient in the majority of cases.

Environmental (deep) clean following a positive COVID-19 case disrupts a school's ongoing operations and can close a school for up to two days. Environmental clean should only be conducted on a case-by-case basis on advice from the relevant jurisdiction's education and/or health departments.

Cleaning and disinfecting

Cleaning means to physically remove germs, such as SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19), dirt, grime and impurities from surfaces using a detergent and warm water.

Cleaning a surface is required prior to undertaking disinfection.

A detergent is a surfactant that is designed to break up oil and grease with the use of water.¹

Disinfecting means using chemicals to kill germs on surfaces or objects. Killing germs on a surface after cleaning can further lower the risk of spreading infection. It is important to clean before disinfecting because dirt and grime can reduce the ability of disinfectants to kill germs.

¹ Safe Work Australia [Recommended cleaning: Supplementary information](#), 12 April 2021.

Coronaviruses like SARS CoV-2 can survive on surfaces for many hours, but cleaning and disinfection will kill them. How long the virus survives on surfaces varies. The amount of contaminated body fluid (for example respiratory droplets), the type of surface, the temperature and the humidity all affect how long the virus survives.

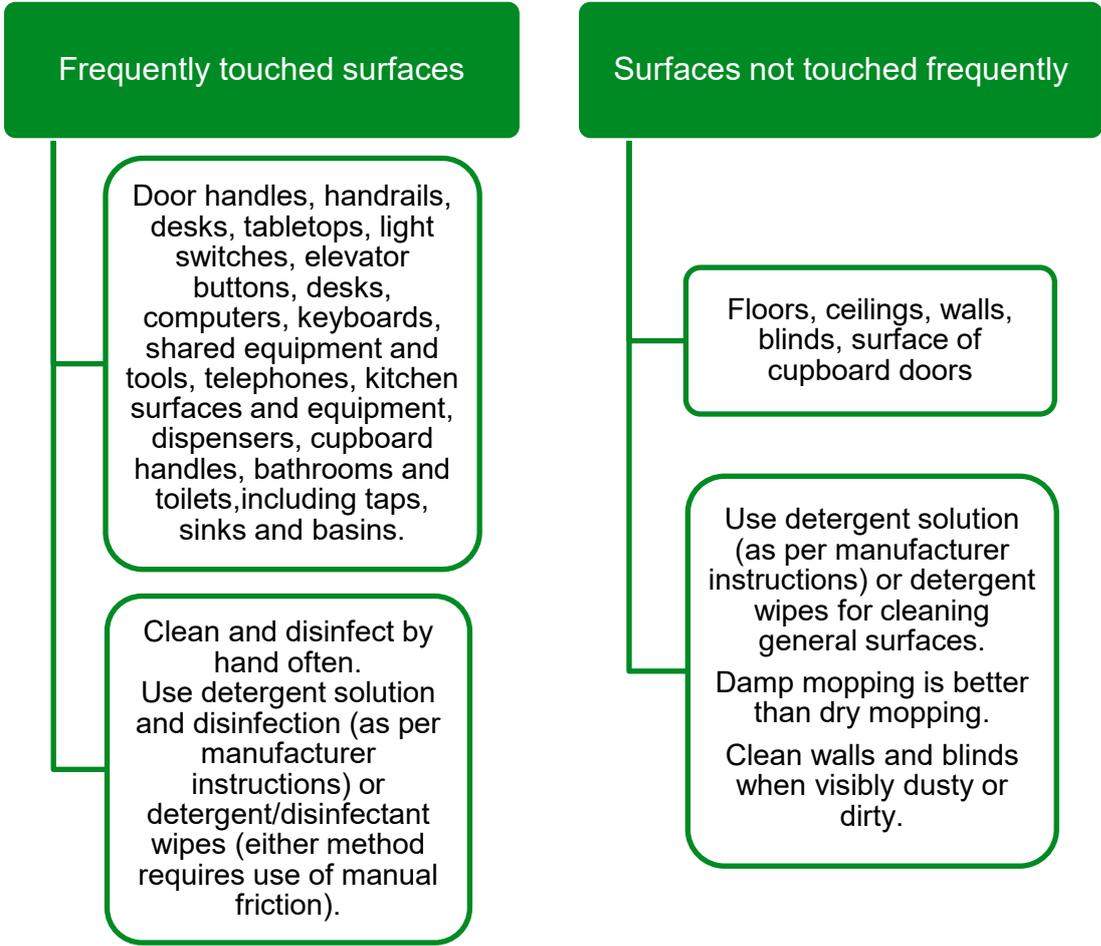
Cleaning and disinfecting can be achieved by either:

- a **2-in-1 clean and disinfection**: physical clean using a combined detergent and Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) listed hospital-grade disinfectant with activity against viruses (according to label/product information), or a chlorine-based product such as sodium hypochlorite, or equivalent for safe use in school environments, where indicated for use i.e. a combined detergent/disinfectant wipe or solution, or
- a **2-step clean and disinfection**: physical cleaning with detergent followed by disinfection with a TGA-listed hospital-grade disinfectant with activity against viruses (according to label/product information) or a chlorine-based product such as sodium hypochlorite or equivalent for safe use in school environments.

Directions on the label of cleaning and disinfectant products must always be followed to ensure cleaning and disinfection are performed correctly.

As well as following the school’s regular cleaning schedules, during COVID-19, frequently touched surfaces should be cleaned and disinfected with detergent solution or detergent/disinfectant wipes at least once daily (see Figure 1 below).

Figure 1: Routine cleaning²



² Adapted from Australian Guidelines for the Prevention and Control of Infection in Healthcare, Canberra: National Health and Medical Research Council (2019).

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

Types of cleaning

Type of cleaning	Suggested indications
Regular school cleaning – typically delivered under a statewide whole-of-government cleaning contract.	Done in all schools before or after school hours. Surfaces are wiped over by hand, using detergent and water. Most hard surfaces can be cleaned well with detergent and warm water. ³
Day cleaning - Done in line with AHPCC guidelines targeting bathrooms, supplies, bubblers and frequently touched surfaces.	An additional cleaning of all toilet blocks and drinking facilities between recess and lunch breaks, as well as additional cleaning of high-touch areas.
Enhanced cleaning - Provides a 25% increase in regular school cleaning in terms of cleaning hours targeting high traffic area, with a focus on touchpoints and surfaces.	Done before or after school. Provides school communities with an additional layer of assurance.
Environmental cleaning (or deep clean) of entire school. The school is typically closed for one to two days	Specialist cleaners carry out an intense (or deep) environmental clean. Will only take place on a case-by-case basis where it has been assessed as required by the school, e.g. large and poorly controlled outbreaks.

Cleaning for COVID-19

Cleaning for COVID-19 should incorporate routine and regular daily cleaning with escalation to enhanced cleaning where cases have been identified.

Environmental (deep) clean with building or facility closures should be reserved for large uncontrolled outbreaks or opportunistic at end of term with deep level cleaning/disinfection of all functional areas.

School common areas, such as bathrooms and toilets, gymnasium, canteen, and front office

Use a detergent/disinfectant solution/wipe to clean frequently touched surfaces at least daily or when visibly dirty.

Clean floors using a detergent solution.

Vacuum carpets using a vacuum with a high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter. Do not vacuum in a room or space that has people in it.

³ Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care, [Environmental Cleaning: Information for Cleaners](#)

School classrooms

Every day, clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces, such as door handles, light switches, railings, desks, shared keyboards and mice with detergent and disinfectant wipe/solution.

Vacuum carpets using a vacuum with a HEPA filter. Do not vacuum in a room or space that has people in it.

Increase how often you clean school classrooms:

- based on local numbers of COVID-19 cases (i.e. if there is a local outbreak)
- where there are suspected or confirmed COVID-19 cases at the school.

Information for school cleaning staff

Day cleaners in schools have minimal contact with students and may be required to be fully vaccinated depending on jurisdictional requirements. All day cleaners on school sites are required to wear personal protective equipment (PPE) as an additional measure.

There is less risk of getting COVID-19 when performing routine cleaning than when face-to-face with a sick person. This is because the sick person may be coughing, sneezing or producing respiratory droplets, by shouting for example.

When cleaning schools following a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19, cleaners should:

- Avoid touching their face, especially their mouth, nose, and eyes when cleaning.
- Use disinfectant products safely and pay close attention to hazard warnings on product labels.
- Follow the school's standard procedures for handling waste.
- Adhere to PPE requirements (see below).

Where cleaning on or around electrical equipment/fittings, isolate electrical equipment and turn off power source if possible before cleaning with liquids.⁴

PPE

Cleaners should:

- Be trained in the correct PPE to be worn when performing their duties and the correct way to put on and take off PPE.
- Wear the appropriate PPE identified on the label and the Safety Data Sheet (SDS) of the cleaning/disinfectant product.
- Wear a surgical mask and protective eyewear as a minimum while cleaning. Use of additional PPE such as gown, fluid-resistant disposable gloves, face shield or apron would depend on factors such as the type of cleaning and chemical used.
 - Fluid-resistant disposable gloves and other standard precautions must be used to avoid coming into contact with surfaces that are soiled with body fluids or blood.
 - The surgical mask and eye protection act as barriers to people touching their face with contaminated hands and fingers by accident, whether gloved or not.
 - Prescription glasses are not protective eyewear. Prescription **safety** glasses (meeting the standards) comply with protective eyewear.

⁴ Safe Work Australia [Recommended cleaning: Supplementary information](#), 12 April 2021.

- Perform hand hygiene, either using soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitiser, before putting on and taking off any PPE. Alcohol solutions containing 60-80% alcohol are most effective.

Use of disinfectant

Following cleaning using a detergent to remove any dirt and grime, use a disinfectant with antiviral activity (meaning it can kill the virus). Use disinfectants in line with the instructions to make sure it is left on the area for long enough.

Obtain a copy of the SDS for the detergent or disinfectant for locations where these are in use.

The [Australian Register of Therapeutic Goods](#) lists products that have virucidal (able to kill the virus) claims.

Disinfection products should not be used while children are present within the area.

[Ventilate](#) the space when using cleaning products.

If using a freshly made bleach solution (sodium hypochlorite), follow the instructions for the correct dilution and use (see Appendix 1 for dilution instructions).

Wipe the area with disinfectant solution using disposable paper towels, a disposable cloth or impregnated wipe.

On completion of cleaning/disinfection, remove PPE in the correct order.

Wash hands well using soap and water and dry with disposable paper or single-use cloth towel, or use an alcohol-based hand sanitiser, unless hands are obviously dirty.

Dispose of gloves and mask in a leak proof plastic bag.

Any reusable cleaning equipment, including mop heads and reusable cloths should be laundered and completely dry before re-use.

General hygiene while cleaning the school

The risk of transmission of COVID-19 can be lowered with a good standard of general hygiene. This includes:

- Promoting cough etiquette and respiratory hygiene (cover a cough or sneeze with the elbow).
- Disposing tissues and other personal use items immediately into the bin.
- Practising physical distancing, where possible (over 1.5 m apart).
- Avoiding physical contact in greetings, such as shaking hands or hugging.
- Using soap and water for hand hygiene at any time and especially when hands are visibly dirty. Use alcohol-based hand sanitiser as an alternative to soap and water, except when hands are visibly dirty.
- Staying home if feeling unwell with COVID-19 symptoms and getting tested.

Emerging Cleaning Technologies

There are increasing availability of emerging and novel cleaning technologies with varying level of evidence supporting their use. These technologies may only be of benefit as enhanced cleaning where outbreaks have been difficult to contain, should only be used after a manual cleaning with neutral detergent has been completed and with consideration to cost/analysis benefit.

Disinfectant fogging

ICEG does not recommend disinfectant fogging for COVID-19.

Disinfectant fogging (sometimes called misting) involves spraying of very fine droplets of disinfectant in a room, usually leaving a wet surface. This method may not kill the virus because not enough disinfectant is used to cover all surfaces or the area has not been cleaned prior to use.

This type of disinfection can also cause chemical exposure to the operator and other people within the plume of the mist and requires training and PPE. Fogging also needs a long time to allow the droplets to settle onto surfaces before the room can be used again. Safe Work Australia provides information on cleaning to prevent the spread of COVID-19 on their [website](#).

Ultraviolet disinfection

ICEG does not recommend ultraviolet (UV) disinfection for COVID-19.

Ultraviolet-C (UVC) radiation has been used in some settings but does not have a role in disinfection to prevent infection transmission. There is not enough information about the exposure, wavelength, dose, and duration of UVC radiation needed to kill the COVID-19 virus.

This type of disinfection also requires training and PPE. UV disinfection may not disinfect surfaces enough which are in shadow from the UVC source. It can't be used in areas occupied by people because it can cause eye and skin irritation.

More information

For the latest advice, information and resources, go to www.health.gov.au

For more information about cleaning to prevent the transmission of COVID-19, go to:

- Safe Work Australia: <https://covid19.swa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-04/cleaning-table-covid19-12-April-2021.pdf>
- Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care: <https://www.safetyandquality.gov.au/our-work/infection-prevention-and-control/environmental-cleaning-and-infection-prevention-and-control-resources>
- In early childhood education (National Health and Medical Research Council): <https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/reports/clinical%20guidelines/ch55-staying-healthy.pdf>

For a list of TGA published disinfectant products that are permitted to claim they are effective against COVID-19, go to:

<https://www.tga.gov.au/disinfectants-use-against-covid-19-artg-legal-supply-australia>

Call the National Coronavirus Health Information Line on 1800 020 080. It operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week. If you require translating or interpreting services, call 131 450.

The phone number of each state or territory public health agency is available at www.health.gov.au/state-territory-contacts

If you have concerns about your health, speak to a doctor.

Appendix 1 Preparing chlorine-based disinfectant solution

- Chlorine (bleach) can kill viruses but handling it can be hazardous for people if it's not handled correctly and not used as instructed.
- Use a safer alternative, where possible, and always follow the instructions.
- Know when and how to dilute it correctly (for example, always pour concentrate into the water, never the other way around).
- Work in a well ventilated area and wear personal protective equipment (see below).
- DO NOT use with any other products (for example, toilet bowl cleaners, acids including vinegar, or anything containing ammonia).

When preparing bleach solutions:

- Wear gloves when handling and preparing bleach solutions.
- Wear protective eye wear in case of splashing.
- Bleach solution should be:
 - made up daily
 - used mainly on hard, non-porous surfaces (it can damage materials and metals).
- Follow the instructions to make sure the solution has enough time to kill the virus. 10 minutes of contact time is required at a concentration of 0.01% or 1 minute for a concentration of 0.1%.

Household bleach comes in different strengths. The concentration of active ingredient — hypochlorous acid⁵ — is on the product label.

Table 1. Recipes to achieve a 1000 ppm (0.1%) bleach solution

Original strength of bleach ⁶		Disinfectant recipe		Volume in standard 10L bucket
%	Parts per million	Parts of bleach	Parts of water	
1	10,000	1	9	1000 mL
2	20,000	1	19	500 mL
3	30,000	1	29	333 mL
4	40,000	1	39	250 mL
5	50,000	1	49	200 mL

⁵ Hypochlorous acid (HOCl) is a weak acid formed when chlorine (Cl) dissolves in water and dissociated to hypochlorite (ClO⁻) which is the oxidising disinfectant in bleach

Note that prediluted bleach solutions lose effect over time and when exposed to sunlight.

⁶ Most household bleach sold in Australia is 4% or 5% strength.