

Safer Cleaning, Sanitizing & Disinfecting

A homeless service provider's guide to effective
and less toxic cleaning & disinfecting practices
during the COVID-19 pandemic



Introduction

This document offers homeless service providers guidance on cleaning, sanitizing, and disinfecting to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 and other communicable diseases. The recommendations in this document also promote safer cleaning practices that aim to minimize staff and guest exposure to harmful chemicals during use and storage of cleaning products.

SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, [primarily spreads from person-to-person](#) in the following three ways:

- Inhaling air containing small droplets and infectious aerosols.
- Absorbing fallen droplets through the mucous membranes, like the eyes or mouth, when an infected person coughs or sneezes.
- Touching mucous membranes with soiled hands.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the risk of contracting COVID-19 from touching contaminated surfaces is [considered low](#). The [best ways to reduce the spread of COVID-19](#) include [getting vaccinated](#), wearing a [mask that covers your nose and mouth](#), maintaining 6-foot social distancing, avoiding crowds in poorly ventilated spaces, [improving ventilation](#), and regular hand washing. That said, cleaning, sanitizing, and/or disinfecting surfaces daily is still important in preventing the transmission of respiratory and diarrheal illnesses (such as the common cold, hepatitis A, norovirus, etc.).

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Definitions

Cleaning, **sanitizing**, and **disinfecting** are similar but have different uses.

Ensure the right method is used for each cleaning task.



Cleaning removes dirt and debris from surfaces by scrubbing with soap or detergent and rinsing with water

Always clean before sanitizing or disinfecting, especially if surfaces are visibly dirty. Sanitizers and disinfectants are far less effective on dirty surfaces

Sanitizing reduces the number of germs on surfaces to a safe level and lowers the risk of spreading an infection.

Sanitize **food-contact surfaces** (e.g., dishes, kitchen counters, appliances) and **easy-to-wipe children's toys**, as sanitizers are less harmful to human health.

Disinfecting kills germs and stops them from growing. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regulates disinfectants to ensure their efficacy. **Only use EPA registered disinfectants.**

Disinfect restrooms and high-touch surfaces once a day (or more if needed).

SAFETY TIP:

Overusing disinfectants can be harmful. **Try limiting the use of disinfectants to once per day unless you know someone is sick, there are bodily fluids present (blood, vomit, feces, urine), or the space is a high traffic area or room.**

Daily cleaning practices

The following recommendations are intended for daily use when no person with confirmed or suspected COVID-19 (or any other communicable illness) has been known to be in the space. For guidance on cleaning after a confirmed or suspected COVID-19 case, review page 7.

Surface/room	Cleaning frequency
Restrooms 	Clean and <u>disinfect</u> restrooms at least once a day, or more depending on use.
High touch surfaces  (e.g., door handles, sink, railings, computers, elevator buttons, etc.)	Clean and <u>disinfect</u> high touch surfaces at least once a day (1x/day). Note: Clean (or clean and disinfect) surfaces more often if needed. Visit CDC's Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility for additional guidance.
Kitchen/food-contact surfaces and toys 	Clean and <u>sanitize</u> kitchen surfaces after each use. Children's toys should be cleaned and sanitized regularly. Note: Public Health's Sanitation and Hygiene Guide offers more details about cleaning in the kitchen.

Personal safety

Consider these key recommendations for safe handling of chemicals. For additional safety tips and precautions, review pages 5 & 6.



Open windows & doors to increase fresh air flow.



Review product labels for instructions on mixing, contact time, and personal protective equipment (PPE).



Do not mix cleaning products.



Wear required PPE and consider installing an eye wash station.

Note: [WA State law](#) requires certain disinfectants be used near an eye wash station.



Wash hands immediately after removing PPE.

Selecting products

WHY choose safer products?

- ✓ **Protect** people who are using or exposed to cleaning products. Strong chemicals can irritate the eyes and throat, cause headaches, and trigger asthma.
- ✓ **Reduce Exposure** to toxic products. Some health effects are immediate (like asthma attacks), while other effects may not show up for years or decades.
- ✓ **Protect Children.** Children (and pets) are more sensitive than adults to the effects of toxic chemicals in the environment.



Asthma



Skin Irritation



Eye Irritation



Headache

- ✓ The [EPA's List N](#) provides a list of disinfectants approved for COVID-19. Use it to select an appropriate disinfectant.

- ✓ Look for disinfectants with safer active ingredients, such as:

- Hydrogen peroxide
- Ethanol or Isopropanol alcohol
- Citric Acid
- L-lactic acid
- Peroxyacetic acid



- ✓ Purchase products that are certified to be safer for human health and the environment when possible. Some example labels include:



- ✓ Always use food-contact approved sanitizers and cleaners in the kitchen. Look for these details on product labels.

- ✓ Review the “signal word” on product labels. The signal labels **DANGER** and **WARNING** indicate a product is highly or moderately toxic.

Instead, look for a signal word of **CAUTION** or products with no signal word as they are less toxic options.

- ✓ Select unscented soaps and detergents whenever possible. Always select unscented bleach.



Safety Tips

- ✔ Clear rooms out before cleaning to avoid exposing people to chemical aerosols and odors. **Be sure to open windows and doors** for maximum air flow and ventilation.



- ✔ Mix chemicals based on the label instructions. Smelling the odor from chemicals during cleaning may be a sign that too much is being used.



- ✔ Replenish spray bottle solutions of bleach every 24 hours to ensure effectiveness. Open containers (e.g., buckets) of bleach-water solutions should be replaced every 2-4 hours, or when the water gets cloudy.



- ✔ Ensure all chemical bottles and containers are labeled with the product name.



- ✔ Pay attention to the recommended contact time (or “wet time”) for each product. Contact time is the amount of time (for example, 30 seconds to 10 minutes) a product needs to stay wet on a surface in order for the chemical to work.



- ✔ Store cleaning products in secure, cool, and dry areas that are away from food and children. Check expiration dates to ensure products are still effective.



Safety Precautions

- ⊗ Do not prepare or use chemicals in poorly ventilated spaces, or near children and vulnerable people.



- ⊗ Avoid spray bottle applicators when possible, to reduce the number of chemical aerosols produced during cleaning. Use chemical wipes or “pour” and “pump” bottles instead.

Note: If using spray bottles, dampen paper towels with solution instead of spraying surfaces from a distance.



- ⊗ Spraying disinfectants in the air is **not effective** in eliminating aerosolized SARS-CoV-2 particles or other contaminants. Using chemicals improperly or in a manner that deviates from the label instructions may provide more risk than benefit.



- ⊗ Foggers, misters, electrostatic sprayers, or chemical “bombs” for rooms and surfaces are **not recommended** for the control of COVID-19. These devices [aerosolize chemicals](#) that can stay suspended in the air for long periods of time.



- ⊗ Disinfecting products that do not have an EPA registration number on the label, may not be safe or effective. Federal law requires disinfectants be registered with the EPA.

Cleaning after a confirmed or suspected COVID-19 case



Step 1: Close off all areas visited by that person and wait as long as possible (3-5 hours at least) before cleaning and disinfecting.

To clean & disinfect surfaces



Step 2: Open outside doors and windows and use fans or HVAC to increase air circulation. Make sure fans are blowing air outside. Review Public Health's [Guidance for Improving Indoor Air Quality](#) for recommendations on maximizing ventilation.



Step 3: Wear required PPE (e.g., gloves, masks, protective clothing, eye protection, etc.).



Step 4: Use a disinfectant from [EPA's List N](#). Choose safer ingredient products whenever possible.



Step 5: Address all areas used by the confirmed/suspected individual, focusing especially on frequently touched surfaces.

Note: If more than 3 days have passed, additional cleaning and disinfection (beyond what normally occurs) is not required.

For more detailed guidance, visit CDC's [Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility](#).

DIY cleaner, sanitizer, and disinfectants

Cleaner (multi-purpose)	Sanitizer (for kitchen surfaces and children's toys)	Disinfectant (for COVID-19)	Special disinfectant (for Hepatitis A, Norovirus, and bodily fluid spills)
1-2 teaspoons (tsp) of unscented soap or detergent + 1 cup water	1 Tablespoon unscented bleach + 1 gallon cool water —or— 1 tsp + 1 quart cool water	1/3 cup unscented bleach + 1 gallon cool water —or— 4 tsp of bleach + 1 quart of cool water —or— EPA's List N COVID-19 approved disinfectants	1 cup unscented bleach + 1 gallon cool water

References

1. [Sanitation and Hygiene Guide](#) (King County)
 2. [How to Clean and Disinfect Schools to Help Slow the Spread of Flu](#) (CDC)
 3. [What's the difference between products that disinfect, sanitize, and clean surfaces?](#) (EPA)
 4. [Guidance on Improving Indoor Air Quality](#) (King County)
 5. [Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility](#) (CDC)
 6. [Alternative Disinfection Methods](#) (CDC)
 7. [Scientific Brief: SARS-CoV 2 Transmission](#) (CDC)
 8. [SARS-CoV-2 and Surface Transmission for Indoor Community Environments](#) (CDC)
 9. [Safer Cleaning and COVID-19](#) (King County)
 10. [Cleaning, sanitizing and disinfecting - material in Spanish](#) (King County)
 11. [Choose safer, more environmentally-friendly products](#) (King County)
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Questions?

Contact Public Health's HEART (Health Engagement Action Resource Team) at CHS.HEART@Kingcounty.gov, to learn more about safer cleaning during COVID-19, and disease prevention support for homeless service sites.