

What you need to know about Cleaning, disinfection and influenza (the “flu”)



Did you know all types of influenza viruses, or flu, can survive on hard surfaces for hours or even days?

Most surfaces in public places are not, or could not be, cleaned regularly enough to stay free of viruses at all times.

Contaminated surfaces such as door handles, elevator buttons, handrails, toys and other frequently encountered everyday objects play a role in spreading the flu because they transfer viruses to our hands through touching and handling, then our hands allow the viruses to enter the body through the mouth, nose or eyes.

The most effective way to avoid getting the flu from contaminated surfaces is to sanitize your hands on a regular basis. The influenza virus is easily killed by hand washing with soap and water and by using hand sanitizers.

Keeping commonly touched surfaces clean can help to reduce the amount of germs on a surface. Sometimes it is best to both clean *and* disinfect a surface.

What is the difference between cleaning and disinfection?

Cleaning is the physical removal of dirt from a surface using warm or hot water, a detergent (soap) and friction (rubbing). **Disinfection** is the process that destroys most of the disease-causing germs on surfaces. Disinfection is generally done with a chemical solution.

Choosing products

Cleaning household surfaces with a detergent (soap) and warm or hot water, followed by a clean water rinse, is adequate for most household surfaces most of the time.[†]

When additional infection control measures are preferred, such as when dealing with surfaces frequently touched by the public or in the household when someone is ill with the flu, using a disinfectant on a surface can give an additional margin of safety.

There are many types of disinfectants available for purchase, many of which clean and disinfect in one step. It is important to read the label for these products:

- Look for the word “disinfectant” on the label.
- Never mix two different products together.
- Follow the instructions carefully. Product labels will tell you how to use the product and how long to leave the disinfectant on the surface.
- Be cautious when using a disinfectant on surfaces that come into contact with food or items that may be mouthed, like toys. For most products, a final rinse with clean water is necessary.

-
- Avoid spraying aerosol cleaners or disinfectants directly onto hard surfaces, which releases chemicals into the air. Instead, dip a cloth into a bucket of solution, or spray the solution onto a soft cloth at close range then wipe the cloth onto the surface to clean and disinfect.

Tips for public places

Cleaning *and* disinfecting are recommended for surfaces in public places that are frequently touched by many people. These include door handles, elevator buttons, handrails, shared keyboards and telephones. For surfaces that are not frequently touched, such as floors, walls and chairs, cleaning alone is adequate.

Providing access to alcohol-based hand sanitizers in areas where a sink for hand washing is not readily available helps to decrease the amount of contamination on people's hands and, therefore, on public surfaces.

How often surfaces are cleaned depends on several factors, such as the number of people touching the surface, and the availability of people or products to perform the activity. In high traffic areas, you should consider cleaning at least twice a day.

Tips for households

Cleaning *and* disinfecting should be considered when someone in the household is sick with the flu. Focus on the ill person's immediate area: the washroom they use and any items they touch. Provide the ill person with tissues and a wastebasket for disposal.

Dishes and laundry should be cleaned using warm or hot water and soap. No special products are needed.

More information

Call Oxford County Public Health at 519.539.9800 | toll-free 1.800.755.0394.

www.oxfordcounty.ca/publichealth

[†]*Disinfection recommendations are different for settings where indoor environments are easily and frequently contaminated with body fluids, such as health care settings and child care. Please contact Public Health for information regarding disinfection in these settings.*