

CLEANERS AND JANITORS

Confronting COVID-19

Working during the COVID-19 pandemic? Concerned about your health and safety? Health and safety law says **your employer must take every reasonable precaution to protect you**. But what is reasonable in the circumstances and follows Public Health directives? The precautionary principle should guide all actions. In other words, the absence of scientific certainty should not prevent prudent actions. Consider the following.

According to health and research authorities the COVID-19 virus can survive on surfaces for hours and even days depending on the surface. Generally, the harder the surface the longer it lasts. As such, proper cleaning and disinfecting is crucial to prevent the spread of the virus. While we have developed a number of cleaning related information resources, this resource is intended to help safeguard the health of workers who do the cleaning and disinfecting. Specifically, it is intended for cleaners and janitors who work in community, non-health care facilities. **The recommendations below are offered in addition to general recommendations to [safeguard workers confronting COVID-19](#).**

Precautions when using or preparing cleaning and disinfecting solutions:

- Review safety data sheets (SDS) for all cleaners and disinfectants to be used
- When preparing solutions (especially bleach), always follow manufacturer's instructions for proper use of products — such as recommended dilution, material compatibility, storage, shelf-life, and safe use and disposal
- Wear personal protective equipment (PPE), especially gloves, as indicated on the manufacturer's instructions or safety data sheets (SDS) (for general advice see below)
- Never mix bleach with ammonia or any other cleaner, in fact do not mix any cleaning chemicals, as they may create a hazardous and even deadly gas.

Please note: All cleaners must be properly trained in Globally Harmonized WHMIS. Namely, this training must result in the workers being able to use information required by WHMIS to protect their health and safety [s. 7(3), WHMIS Reg.]. This training must be developed and implemented in consultation with the joint health and safety committee or health and safety representative. See Workers Health & Safety Centre [WHMIS Resources](#) for details.

Precautions before, during and after cleaning and disinfecting:

- Close off the area to other people and wait as long as possible (at least 30 minutes, but if

cleaning after a person who has been identified as suspected, presumed or confirmed as infected with COVID-19, then wait at least 24 hours) before commencing cleaning and disinfection. Open outside doors and windows to increase air circulation and ventilation

- Do not touch your face or hair at any time after you start cleaning and before removing gloves
- Do not use compressed air or water sprays to clean potentially contaminated surfaces as these techniques may suspend the virus into the air
- Do not shake dirty laundry (This way you minimize the potential of dispersing the virus through the air.)
- Properly [remove gloves](#) and dispose of them immediately in a plastic-lined, non-touch (or open) waste bin (Do not use disposable gloves for more than one room.) or properly clean and decontaminate reusable gloves, after cleaning a room or area
- Properly wash hands immediately after gloves are removed
- If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60 per cent alcohol
- Wash clothing worn in accordance with manufacturer's instruction, using the warmest appropriate water setting for the items and dry items completely.

Personal Protective Equipment

In health care settings personal protective equipment (PPE) is essential for all interactions with suspected, presumed or confirmed COVID-19 patients. In other workplaces working during the COVID-19 pandemic, this kind of protection against COVID-19 may not be necessary. Some PPE, including facemasks, can cause a false sense of security and offers limited protection. Improper use can also increase the risk of infection. As such, public health authorities tell us PPE is not a replacement for social distancing, or thorough and frequent hand hygiene. However, some PPE for cleaners is appropriate. This includes:

- ✓ Gloves, compatible with disinfectant products being used. Ensure proper fit. (Gloves that are too big can allow water, chemicals or the virus to enter. Gloves that are too small can rip or tear.)
- ✓ Face shields if there is a potential for splash
- ✓ Disposable gowns or if gowns are not available, coveralls, aprons or work uniforms can be worn (Re-useable (washable) clothing should be laundered afterwards.)
- ✓ Shoe covers or dedicated shoes that can be decontaminated
- ✓ Fit tested N-95 respirator or higher level of respiratory protection such as a powered air purifying respirator (PAPR), if cleaning and disinfecting an area where a suspected, presumed or confirmed person with COVID-19 worked or visited.

Prior to any cleaning tasks, training on proper use and limitations of personal protective equipment (PPE) should be provided, including putting on and removal of PPE, proper disposal, and how to properly clean, decontaminate, and maintain reusable PPE after and between uses.

To learn more, check out other related WHSC docs.

[Safeguards for Workers Confronting COVID-19](#)

[Cleaning and Disinfecting: Confronting COVID-19](#)

[Laundering Work Wear: Confronting COVID-19](#)

[Evaluating Disinfectants for use against the COVID-19 Virus](#)

[Gloves at Work: Safeguards for Workers Confronting COVID-19?](#)

[Respiratory and Eye Protection at Work: Safeguards for Workers Confronting COVID-19?](#)

[Workers' Rights Resources](#)

Further Questions or Concerns?

Review our other COVID-19 resources at www.whsc.on.ca.

Need more help?

Contact your worker member of the joint health and safety committee, worker representative, union representative if you have one, or Workers Health & Safety Centre at contactus@whsc.on.ca or **1-888-869-7950**.

Additional advice from Ontario's Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development

OVERVIEW

Employers and constructors have obligations to protect workers from hazards in the workplace as set out in the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* (OHSA) and its regulations and the directives coming from the Chief Medical Officer of Health.

Workers should raise any concerns to their:

- supervisor
- joint health and safety committee
- health and safety representative.

This will help ensure the employer has taken all reasonable precautions.

Ontario is currently in the midst of a global pandemic. While the COVID-19 situation is changing rapidly, the legislation and regulations used to govern Ontario's workplaces are not.

Under Ontario law, employers have the duty to keep workers, work sites and all workplaces safe and free of hazards. Workers have the right to refuse unsafe work. If health and safety concerns are not resolved internally, a worker can seek enforcement of their rights with the ministry's Health and Safety Contact Centre at 1-877-202-0008. Failure of the employer or constructor to comply with the OHSA and its regulations could result in a stop-work order upon inspection by the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development.

BEST PRACTICES

These are covered in the Workers Health & Safety Centre document above. Other WHSC COVID-19 resources found at www.whsc.on.ca.

For more information on worker's rights and employer obligations under health and safety law, including the worker right to refuse unsafe work, check out Workers Health & Safety Centre [online worker OHS rights posters](#) or the [Frequently Asked Questions](#) section of the WHSC website.

RESOURCES

Stay updated with daily government updates on COVID-19:

[Government of Ontario](#)

[Government of Canada](#)

[Public Health Ontario](#).