

Cleaning and Disinfecting for Schools

What should be in school washrooms to ensure proper hand washing?

For teachers and students to wash their hands properly, there must be an adequate supply of liquid soap and paper towels or a hot air hand dryer in every washroom that is accessible for use.

How long can bacteria and viruses live on hard surfaces (such as books, doorknobs, telephones and railings)?

Depending on the microbe, studies have shown that pathogens can survive on environmental surfaces and can infect a person for over a day after being deposited on the surface. Thorough regular cleaning and disinfecting of high-touch surfaces is important.

What kills bacteria and viruses?

Several chemical disinfectants, including chlorine, hydrogen peroxide, iodophors (iodine-based antiseptics), quaternary ammonium and alcohols, are effective against some bacteria and some viruses if they are used in proper concentration for a sufficient length of time. Several types of wipes are available for disinfecting nonporous surfaces. All disinfectants, with the exception of bleach and 70% isopropyl alcohol, must have a Health Canada D.I.N. (Drug Identification Number).

What steps should be taken to clean and disinfect a school facility under normal circumstances?

Under normal conditions, routine cleaning followed by disinfecting procedures for all school buildings is sufficient. No special cleaning or disinfection products are recommended. Environmental Services staff should use appropriate personal protective equipment, including gloves, when using chemical cleaners or disinfectants.

What steps should be taken to clean and disinfect a school facility when there is increased illness in the school?

When there is an increased number of staff and/or students ill, enhanced cleaning and sanitizing needs to be implemented. This involves cleaning the environmental surfaces followed by sanitizing with a high-level disinfectant such as 1:50 bleach, or 0.5% accelerated hydrogen peroxide product, or a stabilized hydrogen peroxide product. Following manufacturer's recommendations regarding proper concentrations and contact time is critical. Increased cleaning and disinfection can be discontinued soon after illness levels return to normal.

What should be used to clean up body fluid spills (blood, vomit, feces)?

Environmental Services staff should use appropriate personal protective equipment, including gloves, when cleaning up body fluid spills. Body fluids should be cleaned up by first physically removing the body fluid, followed by disinfecting with a high-level disinfectant. Following manufacturer’s recommendations regarding proper concentrations and contact time is critical.

Exceptional circumstances in the community

If there is illness in the community that would change how the cleaning and sanitizing of the schools should be done, the local public health unit would advise boards of education.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the Environmental Health Officer at your local Public Health Protection Program office.

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