

# PROTECTING WORKERS

from COVID-19



## CLEANING AND JANITORIAL JOBS

### What hazards do cleaning and janitorial workers face in this pandemic?

People who clean workplaces and public spaces are essential workers in a pandemic. Their job is to help prevent the spread of the virus, by removing it from surfaces through cleaning, sanitizing, or disinfecting. Their work not only puts them at risk of coming into contact with the virus but also involves the use of chemicals which can be hazardous to their health. For more information on hazardous chemicals in the workplace, see [mflohc.mb.ca/cleaning-chemicals](https://mflohc.mb.ca/cleaning-chemicals)

### How should workers in cleaning jobs be protected during the pandemic?

Employers are required by law to provide healthy and safe workplaces. This includes finding ways to prevent exposure to COVID-19. All workplaces should have a pandemic plan developed with the workplace health and safety committee which includes both workers and employers.

#### 1. Use appropriate cleaning practices

Cleaning and scrubbing with soap, water and cloths removes dirt and germs from surfaces. Soap breaks down the corona virus' protective coating. That inactivates the virus, stopping it from spreading.

**Disinfecting is not always necessary.** With thorough cleaning, disinfection is only needed where people may be sick with a virus or bacteria and for high-touch spots in areas before people can wash their hands. Make sure there is a plan and a schedule for what to clean and what to disinfect.

##### For spaces where no known cases of COVID-19:

Follow regular cleaning procedures for most areas.

- ✓ Clean frequently-touched surfaces hourly. These include counters, light switches, door or equipment handles/knobs, hand rails, carts, work stations, shared electronic equipment and elevator buttons.
- ✓ Clean other surfaces in occupied spaces at least once a day
- ✓ Use only HEPA filtered vacuum cleaners and periodically deep clean carpets with a hot water injection delivering water at above 60°C.

##### For spaces where there was a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19:

- ✓ Air out the space well for 24 hours **before** cleaning if possible.
- ✓ Try to use single-use disposable cleaning and disinfecting equipment. Properly clean and store non-disposable items.
- ✓ Let disinfectants stay **glistening** wet on the surface or air dry for the entire time specified on the product's label instructions (up to about 10 minutes).

### HOW COVID-19 IS SPREAD



The virus gets into the air when people with it sneeze, cough, shout, sing, and/or talk loudly. Sometimes it just takes sick people breathing in our direction. The longer and closer we are to someone infected with the virus, the greater the possibility we will get it.

There are two main ways to pick-up the virus. The most common is inhaling infected particles in the air. The other is touching contaminated surfaces and then touching your eyes, nose or mouth. The virus can stay in the air and on surfaces from a few hours to several days, depending on air movements and the material.

## 2. Have the right information and training

Employers must give all workers information and training about workplace hazards, including cleaning products and how to use them properly. They must also supply personal protective equipment (PPE) as needed. PPE must be the right kind for the job, and fit properly. Only those workers trained to clean should perform this work.

**Data sheets with information on hazardous products must be available.**

Good data sheets list all the ingredients, describe the harm they can cause, and name specific protective measures and equipment required.

## 3. Use cleaning products correctly

**Only sanitize or disinfect when necessary.** Cleaning with soap or detergent is often all that is needed for most surfaces, even in a pandemic. Cleaning is always the first step **before** sanitizing or disinfecting.

- ✓ Many commercial cleaning products must be diluted before use. Follow the instructions carefully.
- ✓ Pour diluted liquids directly onto cloths or into water.
- ✓ Spray cleaning solution directly into a cloth rather than on a surface. Less spray gets into the air where you could breathe it in.
- ✓ Never mix products or use them on the same surface (unless the first one has dried).
- ✓ If bleach is the only option for disinfecting, dilute it to a 0.05% solution for most surfaces (e.g., 1:100 if the starting concentration is 5%). For toilets and cleaning materials/equipment, use 0.1%. Mix fresh solutions each day.
- ✓ Properly label all cleaning product containers.

## 4. Frequent hand washing

One of the best ways to remove the virus is washing hands with soap and water. All workers need easy access to bathrooms with warm running water, and enough supplies of soap and paper towels to wash hands:

- ✓ when they arrive and leave work
- ✓ before putting on and after taking off PPE (especially respirators and gloves)
- ✓ after close contact with people, surfaces, equipment or tools
- ✓ after blowing nose, coughing, or sneezing.



When that's not possible, hand sanitizers (60-80% ethanol/ethyl alcohol or 60-75% isopropyl alcohol/isopropanol) must be available. Touchless dispensers are best. If the product doesn't include hand lotion, workers need separate water-based hand lotion – without fragrances – to avoid chapping/dry skin.

**Hand sanitizer and gloves do not replace good handwashing practices.**

## 5. Have the right personal protective equipment (PPE)

For general cleaning in areas without suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19, the usual work clothes and gloves are enough protection. If splashes are possible, a face shield is necessary.



**If there was a suspected or confirmed COVID-19 case in the space, equipment should include:**

- ✓ a N95 respirator, which must be tested on you to ensure it will fit and work properly
- ✓ nitrile gloves that fit correctly
- ✓ gowns, coveralls or a uniform and single-use plastic apron
- ✓ access to soap and water (or hand sanitizer) right before and after using the gloves and mask
- ✓ a separate bag for waste material, to be disposed of in unsorted garbage.



Gowns, aprons, respirators, and gloves should be removed carefully to avoid contaminating the worker. **Wash hands with soap and water after removing gloves.**



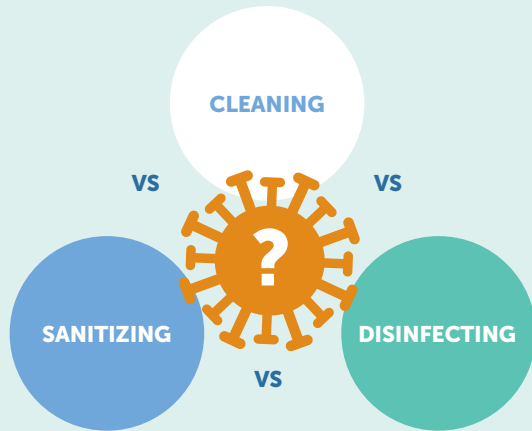
**If there's a problem with any PPE or other protections, report it immediately to a supervisor.**

## 6. Wash all cleaning materials and work clothes safely

Reusable, washable clothing should be washed after each use. Where possible, the employer should look after laundry for work clothes, contaminated or soiled linen, and cleaning materials. If cleaning soiled clothing/linen/laundry at home or elsewhere:

- ✓ handle as little as possible, with no shaking, and wash your hands immediately afterwards.
- ✓ put wet contaminated laundry into a leak-proof container
- ✓ wash clothes in the warmest water possible with detergent and dry thoroughly.

## CLEANING, SANITIZING & DISINFECTING



### What are the differences?

**CLEANING:** Physically removes dirt and germs on surfaces or objects using soap/detergent, water and friction. **This must be done before sanitizing and disinfecting.**

**SANITIZING\*:** Reduces germs on surfaces to levels considered safe for public health.

**DISINFECTING\*:** Destroys almost all germs when used on a surface as label directs. Some affect only viruses, others only bacteria, and some get rid of both.

\*Products must be registered with Health Canada or the US EPA and should be approved to kill coronavirus.

**For more information read "Safer Cleaning Practices for the Workplace" at [mflohc.mb.ca/covid-19](http://mflohc.mb.ca/covid-19)**

## Other important workplace practices

- ✓ Allow extra time for workers to do their jobs and take necessary precautions
- ✓ Remove productivity quotas to allow time for precautions
- ✓ Allow at least 12 hours off between shifts, for travel, rest and sleep
- ✓ Provide information to workers about mental health resources available to them
- ✓ Staggered schedules for entering and leaving the building, and for sharing inside spaces
- ✓ Appropriately-located change rooms to avoid wearing work clothing and shoes home
- ✓ Ventilation systems should be set to take in all fresh air. Recirculated air should go through high-efficiency (HEPA) filters. Intakes and returns need to be cleaned daily and filters changed regularly
- ✓ Maintain distance between anyone in the workplace of 2 metres/6.5 feet from others, especially for more than a few minutes in a closed space
- ✓ Waste bins lined with plastic bags that can be emptied without contacting the contents
- ✓ Individual - not collective or shared  
- transport to and from work



## INFORMATION AND TRAINING ARE ESSENTIAL

Employers must give all workers and supervisors information and training about possible job hazards, including special hazards of COVID-19. During the pandemic this includes:

- ✓ the workplace pandemic plan
- ✓ signs and symptoms of the virus, along with reporting symptoms and taking sick leave
- ✓ hand-washing and sanitizers
- ✓ new or changed tasks and procedures (e.g., cleaning, disinfecting), with related hazards and protections
- ✓ PPE – its purpose, limitations, safely putting on and taking off available community mental health resources
- ✓ procedures to de-escalate, report and deal with all types of violence
- ✓ available community mental health resources

**Information – including posters – should be easy to understand and provided in the workers' languages.**

## RESOURCES:

**For resources and up-to-date information on Coronavirus (COVID-19) visit:**

**[mflohc.mb.ca/covid-19](http://mflohc.mb.ca/covid-19)**



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