

# Ensuring Your Facility Makes a Clean Start

The Next Phase of COVID-19 Recovery:  
**CONFIDENCE CLEANING**

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GLOBAL BIORISK ADVISORY COUNCIL  
A Division of ISSA



**While you look toward a return from today's current COVID-19 societal and business restrictions, your preparation must include a new factor – that of the public's worry that they might catch the virus once people begin to interact again.**

Employees, occupants, and customers want reassurance that the facilities they enter have done the best possible to reduce risk of contracting the virus. Your response to this expectation will dictate whether your organization contributes to a calmer return to activity, leading to a faster economic recovery, or further fuels citizen's anxiety, delaying your business's success. Responsible attention to cleaning and disinfecting, and effective communication about these activities, will go a long way to setting your stakeholders' minds at ease.

However, a lot of misinformation has been spread these last few months regarding what levels of cleaning or disinfecting are needed in a commercial, institutional, or publicly trafficked building.

Many organizations have over-used strong disinfectants in places where increased frequency of routine cleaning steps would be sufficient to protect occupants. That over-use has led to a global shortage of disinfectants and critical ingredients at a time when health care and aged care systems need these chemicals to ensure they can do their part to break the chain of this pandemic and save lives. To further misuse disinfectants during reopening will exacerbate this situation.

To most responsibly address your facility reopening and ongoing occupant protection, ISSA, the worldwide cleaning industry association, advocates for an approach called "confidence cleaning"— a process involving proper risk assessment, followed by implementing all necessary steps for cleaning and, if needed, disinfection, providing assurance that the cleaned area is safe for use and occupancy.

Confidence cleaning should not be confused with what many people have been calling deep cleaning or hospital-grade disinfection.

The latter, which is advanced levels of disinfection, is not necessary for routine operation of a facility if there are no confirmed cases of the virus. These more advanced tactics are best reserved for when an actual case of an infectious disease has been confirmed in the facility, at which time, experts with specific forensic cleaning training can decontaminate the area.

A critical part of confidence cleaning during a pandemic is assessing the risk of the virus entering the facility and being transmitted to additional occupants. A proper risk assessment will identify the important areas, touch points and usage by customers, clients, visitors, etc. Then identifying the cleaning tasks, processes, procedures, frequencies, tools, and training most effective to mitigate that risk for your specific facility. (see Risk Assessment sidebar).

This process also requires proper training of all cleaning staff on the determined steps needed, the frequency, the tools used and personal protective equipment (PPE) required. In addition to making the best choices for the facility's needs, confidence is created among your stakeholders because you properly communicate to them about these activities implemented to protect them.

In a non-pandemic situation, an organization might choose to clean on a routine basis and only disinfect a few highly touched points (called spot disinfecting), if needed at all. Best practice for cleaning during a pandemic, and especially during the return from business shutdowns, first is to identify touch points and prioritize them based on their frequency and likelihood of being contaminated.

Secondly, the frequency of cleaning and disinfection is determined by their usage and realistic ability to address each task, given traffic patterns and other factors unique to the facility. For example, in a restaurant, every table may be cleaned

## Basic Elements of a Site Risk Assessment

Here are the simplified key steps for a risk assessment, based on recommendations from ISSA's Global Biorisk Advisory Council (GBAC), a group of seasoned international experts in pandemic and other high-risk cleaning scenarios:

**Step 1.** Identify the hazards. These involve, for example, potential sites, areas, objects that could become contaminated with SARS-CoV-2, the virus causing COVID-19. Special focus needs to be on high-touch surfaces. Sometimes this can be done by observing what people touch, when and the frequency.

**Step 2.** Assess the risk associated with each of the commonly touched surfaces. The risk is determined by how likely this surface (an inanimate object) will transmit the virus and also how likely it is that this surface becomes actually contaminated.

For example, surfaces that are touched directly after people wash their hands and/or use hand sanitizers will have a lower likelihood to become a source than an object touched frequently by a symptomatic individual.

While this process of evaluating many surfaces in various areas of your building might initially appear cumbersome, the huge benefit is the documented knowledge gained. It will now serve as an "inventory" for any future processes.

**Step 3.** This involves the prioritization of the risks and classifying them from low to high. This will allow the determination of which efforts come first in the cleaning and disinfection process. As well as which tasks can be accomplished with your available staff and within a given workday.

For instance, while it is less likely someone will touch the floor directly and then touch their face, there is a chance that the virus can be walked from one room to another under foot, and occupants have a higher amount of contact with items that have touched the floor than they may realize. So, while it may not be practical to disinfect floors as often as other surfaces, they still will need additional attention.

**Step 4.** Next, determine the cleaning and disinfection processes, frequencies, correct personal protective equipment (PPE) as well as any other relevant administrative processes and procedures (e.g., training requirements, verification of the cleaning and disinfection process, waste disposal, etc.).

**Step 5.** After the cleaning and disinfection has been completed, the process should be tested or audited, taking into consideration any lessons learned and next steps that should be taken.

Risk assessment tips are available at the ISSA coronavirus resource page, [www.issa.com/coronavirus](http://www.issa.com/coronavirus), and when facilities are working toward their GBAC STAR accreditation. ISSA also offers an Accredited Auditing Professional course for quality assurance tips.

and disinfected after every customer, while the floor is cleaned and disinfected only once a day. During a sports event, the washrooms may be cleaned and disinfected after every break or after major usage by visitors. Frequencies need to be established based on available resources, the risk to staff and guests, as well as usage, determined by observation and past experience. The reality is that your initial reopening cleaning and disinfecting plans may need to adjust after you have seen them in practice.

While disinfecting and increased frequency helps reduce the risk of cross-contamination, decision makers should not assume that all areas typically cleaned need increased frequency or disinfecting, until a risk assessment is done. It may be unrealistic to expect best practice cleaning or disinfecting steps after each person touches a surface. The best way to determine the touchpoints that would warrant increased focus, is to walk through a typical path of activity your occupants or customers would take. What handles, buttons, railings, surfaces, and objects are they touching?

## Visible Cleaning

Employees and customers will expect your facility to have taken extra cleaning measures when they return. Making them aware of what you have done to meet their expectations is what will gain their confidence and trust. This can be accomplished in different ways: increased visibility of cleaning – tasks that are done in front of the occupants – shifts in how your staff interacts with them and increased communication about the steps you have taken.

It is important to note that increased visible cleaning does not mean to show off cleaning just for the sake of it. Your cleaning and, if needed, disinfection, is based on your risk assessment. It is however done in front of your clients and customers, so it becomes visible. For example, the cleaning and disinfection of tables in the restaurant is visible to other customers.

When considering visible cleaning tasks, keep in mind that not all chemicals should be used near occupants. Some can be used only if all individuals nearby have the correct personal protective equipment (PPE). It is always recommended to ask your cleaning service provider, cleaning product supplier, or manufacturer for a safety data sheet, usage instructions, efficacy data (proof to back their claims), and relevant government registrations, before using a chemical in front of customers or other

occupants. Review that information in the context of how your provider is recommending you use it in your situation. This will help avoid misuse, unnecessary use or harm to those in the area.

Also, just because an occupant may be required to wear a mask when entering your facility, does not mean that it is the only PPE they need to have to be near someone using a disinfectant. Your employees may need to be careful that customers do not touch that disinfectant.

Therefore, wiping a surface between each customer could be an issue if it doesn't have a fast enough evaporation factor or the employee has not wiped away the wet slurry (what remains after the chemical has made contact with the surface for the recommended amount of time to deactivate a virus, known as dwell time). This and other factors need to be taken into consideration during your risk assessment to determine the best options for more visible cleaning.

Increased communication can be a safe and effective solution to alert occupants and set their minds at ease. This creates awareness and confidence without the issues visible cleaning might raise. Notices placed in prominent locations around your facility, stating what cleaning was performed and how much you have increased frequencies can be helpful. Communicating your increased activities in electronic communications, on your website, in mailers and even inserted into any ongoing customer advertising, can also help draw attention to your added concern for occupants.

Third-party validation that your facility has taken extra measures to protect occupant health is another way to lend credibility to your efforts and further create occupant confidence. ISSA offers the GBAC STAR accreditation for facilities, developed by its Global Biorisk Advisory Council (GBAC). This program assesses that the facility has met 20 criteria for the most relevant protocols any business should implement to best protect occupant health, whether during routine business operations, a pandemic or a heightened cold and flu season. For more details on the GBAC STAR program and how you can get your facility accredited, visit [www.gbac.org](http://www.gbac.org)

## Which Approach is Appropriate?

You might think that, by now, people understand the difference between types of cleaning. But industry professionals are seeing a continued widespread misunderstanding. Part of that is because some traditional

cleaning organizations may not have had much experience with disinfecting for a mass virus outbreak until recently. They are good at what they do but need to be retrained in the differences, especially as new technologies are being released with claims to address this specific virus.

There also are many companies that do not offer traditional cleaning or disinfecting services but have been asked to step in – pest control companies, asbestos removal companies, etc. – not to mention the everyday workers in grocery stores, day care centres, or other, often self-cleaned, locations who have been asked to step up what they do to protect occupants with limited or no training.

This vast range of experience, mixed with increased demand for individuals and companies to provide heightened cleaning services to meet occupant expectations, requires everyone in facility management and cleaning services to get back to basics.

What is cleaning? It is the removal of visible and invisible soiling. Cleaning also prepares a surface or item for disinfection.

Disinfection is a process that eliminates many or all pathogenic microorganisms, except bacterial spores, on inanimate objects. In Europe this technique requires a 5-log reduction, or 99.999%, of pathogens on a surface, while in the United States it requires a minimum 6-log reduction, or 99.9999% reduction of pathogens on a surface.

In contrast to disinfection, which is done to kill bacteria and deactivate viruses, sanitising is gentler, it only lowers the level of biological agents on an object to a safe level. This technique requires a 3-log, or 99.9%, reduction in pathogens. Thus far, we do not know what a safe level of sanitising for Covid-19 is. Therefore, disinfection is recommended, because it will deactivate/destroy the virus if the appropriate procedures and chemicals are used.

To remove dirt and disinfect, you can use either a one-chemical or a two-chemical process:

- The process with a combined cleaning/disinfecting solution begins with dry removal of visible surface soil using a microfibre or paper cloth and then involves application of a single cleaning/disinfectant solution. Such a product performs both actions at once, and neither the disinfectant chemical nor the cleaning agent interferes with the action of the other.
- If you use separate cleaning and disinfecting chemicals, you begin with dry removal of visible surface soil using a microfibre or paper cloth, followed by applying some type of cleaning



agent (most commonly a detergent). This is followed by immediately applying a separate disinfectant that deactivates a virus left on the surface.

Because the majority of facilities will not be at a level where multiple positive COVID-19 carriers are known to be in them at any given time, applying the basics of cleaning and disinfecting with increased frequencies will be satisfactory to reducing risk. Promotion of fogging, fumigating, misting and spraying disinfectants has increased during this pandemic, however you must understand their use to determine if they are right for your specific situation.

Fogging, fumigation, or misting is a process that creates tiny aerosols that stay suspended in air. Unless that air suspension is required, the process is not suitable for the disinfection of surfaces. In fact, some government regulatory agencies have stated that fumigation and wide-area spraying are not appropriate tools for cleaning contaminated surfaces, because they may not be as effective at covering entire surface areas than traditional cleaning methods.

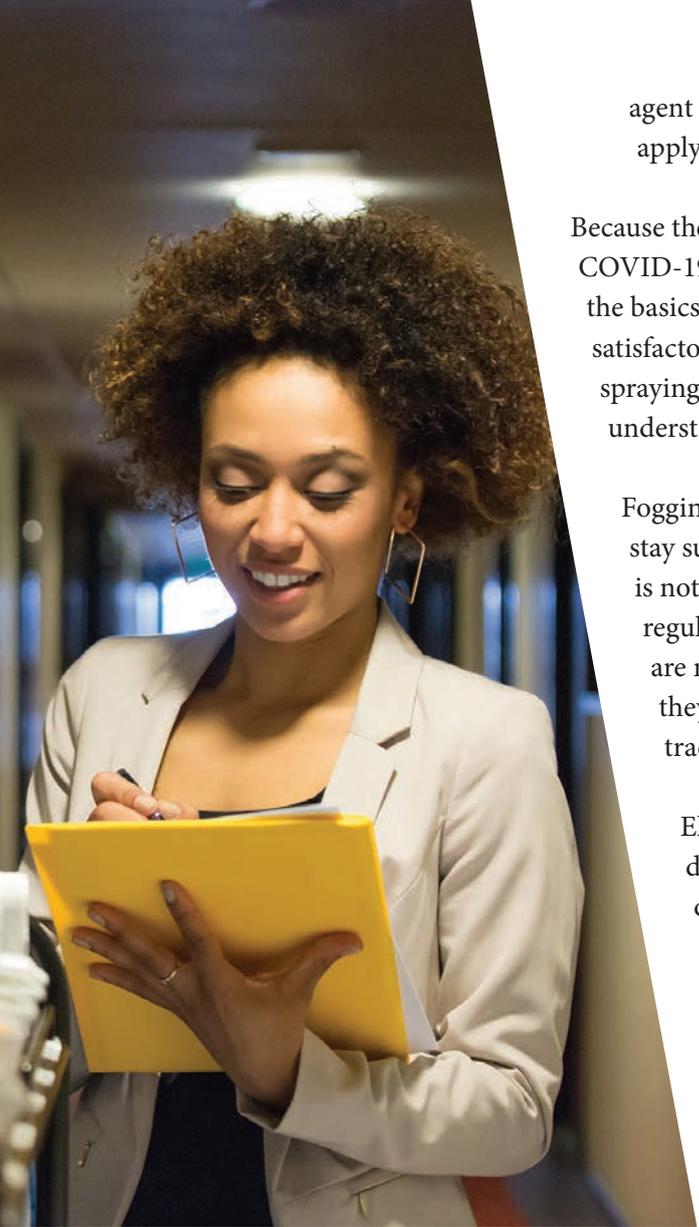
Electrostatic sprayers create droplets that adhere to surfaces and do not stay suspended. This creates a more uniform coverage of disinfectant than fogging, fumigation or misting, which is why it is often recommended for decontamination use when a known case of an infectious disease is present.

Large-scale spraying, even if electrostatic, is not recommended for routine cleaning of most commercial facilities that have not had a known case or multiple cases of the virus. In fact, doing so can put occupants at more risk, as such techniques are meant to be conducted in an unoccupied space and require proper ventilation afterward.

It is also important to note that while a spraying technique may be appropriate in some scenarios, not all chemicals are approved for spraying. Therefore, if someone is offering this service, it is recommended that you request the manufacturer's recommendations for use, to determine if the chemical being used is indeed approved for this technique. Proof of proper training for such techniques also is advisable to request.

Do not spray employees or other occupants with a disinfectant to reduce the risk that they will transfer the virus from one location to another. Disinfectants are intended to be used on inanimate surfaces only and should not be applied to the human body.

Widespread use of fogging, fumigation or misting, whether indoors or outdoors, when it is not necessary, also has the unintended consequence of wasting the critical supply of disinfectants needed to help protect patients in health care settings, where the risk is highest.



In addition, applying unique techniques to surface disinfecting that are approved for non-surface treatments, such as UV or Ozone treatment used for air and water purification, can lead to a disconnect in outcomes. First, the technology used must be specifically for surface treatment to have a positive surface disinfecting outcome.

In addition, some technology requires having no items in the room, to ensure full coverage. Others can be very caustic and possibly damage items or living things (plants, pets, etc.) in the room. Or, they can be useful for small area, acute situations, but are not cost-effective or practical for larger, multi-room scenarios.

There also are various biological or chemical-free alternatives to traditional disinfectants. Some options have positively tested to reduce levels of pathogens on surfaces, but you need to ask for efficacy data to determine if a specific solution has been effective in deactivating an enveloped coronavirus similar to COVID-19 to ensure it will achieve the results you specifically are looking for. As with any cleaning solution, you also should ask about the shelf life of these options and any information regarding the length of time that they remain stable for use.

Some surface coatings also have been touted as helping deactivate SARS-CoV-2, the virus causing COVID-19. However, in many cases, the results show the deactivation takes place over multiple hours or, in some cases, weeks. If occupants are touching the surface before the coating can deactivate the virus, then transmission is still possible. If cleaning or disinfecting that surface cannot be done at a more frequent interval, then a coating could help reduce risk. But it will not reduce the risk at the same level as manual cleaning or disinfecting can. Such coatings also must be wiped to avoid dirt build-up inhibiting their ability to reach any biologicals resting on the top layer. All known coatings at this time also must be re-applied to maintain their efficacy over time.

Again, with any of these technologies, it is recommended to request a product's efficacy data, safety data sheet, usage instructions and relevant government registrations, and to compare that information to your specific need, before accepting claims that it will be the most effective option for your facility.

Another common question during the COVID-19 pandemic has been which cleaning tasks to carry out if proper PPE is not available. During your risk assessment,

## What are We Cleaning for Today?

A virus causes a disease. Therefore, we are cleaning to remove or deactivate the virus causing the current pandemic, to reduce the spread of the disease. The current virus that is infecting humans is the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2, which has the acronym of SARS-CoV-2. The disease it causes is the human coronavirus disease of 2019, named COVID-19.

- In determining how to protect your occupants, it is important to note that viruses are not living things on their own. They are complicated assemblies of molecules. On their own, viruses can do nothing until they enter a living cell. Therefore, they cannot be killed. But they can be deactivated. Deactivation reduces risk of infection. Removal of the virus also reduces risk of infection.
- Coronaviruses have an envelope or outer wrapping. When the virus leaves the infected cell, they cover themselves with part of the cell membrane. Normally that helps them stay unrecognized by the immune system since the envelope was part of a cell that is recognized by the immune system as "safe." On the other hand, the envelope is made of lipids which are susceptible to disinfectants and surfactants. Once the viral envelope has been destroyed, the virus is deactivated.
- When a chemical provider promotes so called "kill claims" this often has to do with bacteria or other living organisms, which can be killed. Your due diligence related to COVID-19 should include looking for specific claims that relate to the human coronavirus.
- Because it can take a significant amount of time to undergo testing to receive government registration specific to a new virus, many countries around the world are expediting their review and registration processes to help increase access to disinfectants that can meet growing demand. Check with your country's authority on chemical registrations to determine what its most current policies are.
- Some governments have posted lists of disinfectants that meet their criteria for use against SARS-CoV-2. Products can make that claim if they have shown in the past that they can deactivate viruses that are much harder to destroy than, for example, enveloped coronaviruses like SARS-CoV-2, or if they have successfully completed testing with the current SARS-CoV-2 virus.

consider whether you are able to adequately protect workers based on manufacturer recommendations for certain chemicals or techniques. If you are not able to protect workers as required, select a method and chemical that is less likely to cause harm for unprotected workers. Your supplier can recommend responsible alternatives that can be as effective to reach your goals.

For specific training regarding soil removal and disinfecting processes, safe chemical use, and specific steps to take, contact [emea@issa.com](mailto:emea@issa.com) for ISSA's Cleaning Basics training, the specialized GBAC Fundamentals Online Course Covid-19 Microbial Warrior or ISSA's IEHA Frontline training for healthcare or hospitality facilities.

## The Bottom Line

You are being asked to step up occupant protection in your facilities under a public scrutiny and level of expectation never before witnessed. Now is the time to leverage your in-house or contract cleaning service provider's expertise to ensure your highest level of successful re-opening and to ensure the safety of your greatest assets – your employees, occupants, and customers.

To do so, your investment in cleaning services must be aligned with your goals for reduced risk. Disinfecting requires longer dwell times to be effective. Increasing cleaning frequency across multiple surfaces further adds time to complete cleaning work. Therefore, more time, staff and investment are required to step up your occupant protection. Trade-offs may also be required to ultimately meet your goals.

There is a way to justify your increased investment through quantified improvements. ISSA has created a Value of Clean Calculator that helps quantify the return on investment of improved cleaning in areas such as reduced employee absenteeism, increased employee productivity, prolonged asset lifecycles and more, based on research results. Find these resources at [issa.com/valuetips](http://issa.com/valuetips). An update to these tools is coming soon, providing even more data you can use to make your business case with your organization's decision makers.

While the work you currently face may seem daunting, the decisions you make to provide responsible cleaning for your facility occupants and to put public health first, during this time of uncertainty and constant change, will inevitably lead to a long-lasting impression and

gratitude. You can reinforce the strong character of your organization through your actions during this crisis. Through a systematic approach, and the help of your trusted cleaning service and product partners, this task can be reasonably managed.

Your attention to proper cleaning and disinfecting will enable your business to kick-start its recovery more quickly from this pandemic's economic impact. And, the steps you take now can improve and sustain your occupants' health and productivity long after this pandemic has subsided.



## About ISSA

As the leading trade association for the cleaning industry worldwide, ISSA is committed to helping its members change the way the world views cleaning. The association provides members with the business tools they need to promote cleaning as an investment in human health, the environment, and an improved bottom line.

For more information about ISSA's Europe, Middle East and Africa regional support, visit [www.issa.com/emea](http://www.issa.com/emea) or send an email to [emea@issa.com](mailto:emea@issa.com).

## About GBAC

ISSA's Global Biorisk Advisory Council is comprised of international leaders in the field of microbial-pathogenic threat analysis, mitigation, response and recovery.

GBAC provides training, guidance, certification, crisis management, assistance and leadership to government, commercial and private entities looking to mitigate, quickly address biological threats and real-time crises, and/or recover from such events.

For more information about ISSA's GBAC division, visit [www.gbac.org](http://www.gbac.org).

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