

Preventing infectious disease in schools:

Cleaning and disinfecting

high-touch surfaces

Opening schools during a pandemic presents many challenges, including how to clean frequently touched surfaces, properly train employees, and consider unique issues faced by specific jobs. This handout provides some basic ideas, along with resource links.

Cleaning vs. disinfecting

Cleaning uses soap and water or a mild detergent and water to clean surfaces. Disinfecting uses biocides to sanitize surfaces. Biocides are designed to destroy harmful microscopic organisms such as viruses and bacteria, and include common products like disinfectant wipes, hand sanitizer, and anti-bacterial soap. Many biocides (the EPA lists examples of products: <https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-coronavirus-covid-19>) also require the use of personal protective equipment (PPE).

Here are some general recommendations:

- Train all employees on the chemicals they will be using
- Provide PPE when necessary
- Disinfect high-touch surfaces at the end of every school day
- Clean high-touch surfaces throughout the day (including in the classroom, cafeteria, and buses)
- Clean desks and tables between different students using them

Other ideas:

- Keep classroom doors open when possible
- Put disposable coverings on commonly touched surfaces
- Remove non-essential furniture and equipment
- Place hand sanitizer stations at entrances
- Post signs about masks, physical distancing, and handwashing
- Install floor markings and directional signs to control flow of students

Teacher and student cleaning routines

Keeping students in one classroom to prevent large gatherings of students helps slow down the spread of COVID-19. This also reduces the number of times desks must be cleaned, which decreases the personnel needed to clean as well as the risk of respiratory or skin irritation.

- Disinfecting chemicals should be used by adults only
- Provide classrooms with a mild detergent spray that doesn't require PPE
- Teacher can spray the cleaner and allow the student to wipe the desk area



Custodians and janitors

Cleaning and disinfecting are critical to reducing the risk of exposure to COVID-19. High-touch surfaces like door handles, desks, phones, light switches, and faucets should be cleaned and disinfected at least daily.

Custodial teams may do the overall cleaning and disinfecting every day, but all staff should support their efforts by cleaning and disinfecting surfaces during the school day.

- Train custodial staff how to safely use chemicals and equipment
- Provide proper PPE and ensure it is used
- Store cleaning products in their concentrated form behind locked doors
- Use electrostatic sprayers on surfaces only when students and other staff aren't present

Food service

Currently, there is no evidence that COVID-19 can be passed on through food, but it pays to take safety precautions around cleaning and disinfecting.

- Have students eat lunches in classrooms instead of in the cafeteria, keeping allergies in mind (when possible)
- Allow students to eat in groups, staggered over time, and clean surfaces between groups
- Block off cafeteria seating so students aren't close together
- Avoid seating on the ends of rows or near high traffic areas

- Set rules against sharing food
- Remove salad bars and other self-serve stations
- Replace dispensers with one-use packets
- Use disposable plates and utensils if possible
- Consider closing the campus during lunch to prevent community spread
- Consider installing Plexiglass barriers where appropriate
- Clean and sanitize high-touch areas between each student group

Employee cleaning

Cleaning and disinfecting schools, classrooms, and offices every day will take a lot of time and overload custodial staff. To alleviate that stress, consider making approved cleaning solutions available so every employee can clean their own workstations.

- Train employees how to use all cleaning products
- Provide a mild multi-surface cleaning detergent that requires no PPE
- Don't allow employees to bring cleaning products from home

Resources

These links provide more information on cleaning and disinfecting in schools.

Healthy Schools Campaign – Resources for cleaning staff

<https://healthyschoolscampaign.org/covid-19-resources-for-cleaning-staff/>

Washington State Department of Labor & Industries – Janitorial tip sheets

- [Watch for symptoms](#)
- [Wash your hands](#)
- [Janitorial safety for employers](#)
- [How to wear and use a homemade mask](#)

