

Routine household cleaning

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Effective cleaning in the household is important for reducing the risk of transmission of many germs. The aim of environmental cleaning is to minimise the number of germs that survive on surfaces. This factsheet provides general information about routine household cleaning only. More specific advice may be required for communal or outbreak settings.

The principles of effective cleaning

- [Reduce the number of germs in the environment](#)
- [Prevent cross infection:](#)
 - clean the cleanest areas first then finish in the dirtier areas
 - separate cleaning equipment for kitchen and bathrooms
- [Mechanical cleaning](#) - use a clean cloth, detergent and water to clean the surface then rinse with clean water and another clean cloth, and then allow to dry. This is the most useful method for removing germs from surfaces
- [Disinfectants](#) - only necessary if a surface has been contaminated with infectious material. Disinfectants will not work on a dirty surface.
- [Keep frequently touched surfaces clean](#)
- [Wash linen regularly in detergent and hot water](#)

Effective environmental cleaning

Some germs can survive in the environment, especially on frequently touched surfaces such as bench tops, door handles and toys. The length of time a germ can survive on a surface depends on the germ itself, the type of surface it has contaminated, and how often the surface is cleaned. Reducing the number of germs in the environment can break the chain of infection.

Basic steps for effective routine cleaning

Start the cleaning process in the cleanest areas and finish in the dirtier areas (also see cleaning equipment section). This method helps to prevent cross-infection because it decreases the risk of contaminating a clean room with germs from a dirty room. Wear either single-use or reusable gloves (such as washing-up gloves) when cleaning. If using reusable gloves wash them off using running water and detergent, and hang them outside to dry. Wash your hands after you have finished cleaning and removed the gloves.

Washing germs away

Routine mechanical (rubbing) cleaning with detergent and water (use as per the label instructions), followed by rinsing and drying, is the most useful method for removing germs from surfaces. A clean cloth (disposable or able to be laundered) should be used each time. Detergents help to loosen the germs so that they can be rinsed away with clean water and then allowing the surface to dry, makes it harder for germs to survive or grow.

Cleaning equipment

Good cleaning equipment includes mops with detachable heads (so they can be washed in a washing machine using hot water), disposable cloths or cloths that can be laundered, and vacuum cleaners preferably fitted with HEPA (high-efficiency particulate air) filters to reduce dust being dispersed. Ensure that cleaning equipment is well maintained, cleaned, and stored.

Different cloths should be used for cleaning different areas eg kitchen, bathroom, toilet. It can be useful to have colour-coded cloths or sponges for each area (e.g. blue in the bathroom, yellow in the kitchen) so that it is easier to keep them separate.

Disinfectants

Disinfectants are usually only necessary if a surface has been contaminated with potentially infectious material. Most germs do not survive for long on clean surfaces when exposed to air and light. Routine cleaning with detergent and water should be enough to reduce germ numbers.

If you do need to use a disinfectant, the disinfectant will not kill germs if the surface has not been cleaned first. Clean surfaces using the advice in the “washing germs away” section.

To kill germs, any disinfectant must:

- have enough time in contact with the surface to kill the germs (as per the manufacturer’s instructions)
- be used at the right concentration
- be applied to a clean, dry surface
- be effective against those particular germs

Frequency of cleaning

Clean all frequently touched surfaces at least weekly. If anyone in the household is sick, cleaning should be done more often, at least daily. This includes items such as kitchen benches, tabletops, doorknobs, bathroom fixtures, toilets, phones, keyboards, tablets and bedside tables. Surfaces should be visibly clean.

Linen

Wash linen regularly in detergent and hot water. Do not carry used linen against your own clothing. Take it to the laundry in a basket or alternative.

Based on Staying Healthy Preventing infectious diseases in early childhood education and care services
FIFTH EDITION 2012 (Updated June2013)

<https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/reports/clinical%20guidelines/ch55-staying-healthy.pdf>