AUSTRALIAN COMMISSION ON SAFETY AND QUALITY IN HEALTH CARE

D21-13136

# Environmental Cleaning: Information for Cleaners

## Introduction

**As cleaners, you are a vital part of our health system. Your work is essential to help prevent the spread of disease in healthcare settings and our community.**

**Careful and thorough cleaning of our healthcare settings, such as hospitals, residential aged and disability care facilities, clinics and general practices, helps provide a safe place for patients, and for the people who work there.**

## What is environmental cleaning?

Environmental cleaning involves the removal of dirt and germs from surfaces, so that the environment is a clean and hygienic space for patients, visitors, and healthcare workers.

Environmental cleaning keeps the community safe from germs, and is an important part of standard precautions, which should be used at all times for all patient care.

The environment in a healthcare setting is the physical space including floors, walls and the ceiling; and furnishings that are in that space, such as curtains, bedside lockers, taps, sinks and door handles.

## Why is environmental cleaning important?

Environmental cleaning is one of the most important ways of stopping germs from spreading. Regular cleaning of environmental surfaces helps to prevent people getting sick from germs when they visit a healthcare setting.

Good environmental cleaning practice should be part of a wider program of activities focussed on preventing and controlling infection.

The best way to clean, and how often to clean, can vary depending on the level of risk. Please see **Tables 1 and 2** for details about how to assess for infection risks in the healthcare setting.

## How is environmental cleaning done?

**Cleaning** is the physical removal of dirt, dust, blood, body fluids and germs from environmental surfaces with a neutral detergent and water. Environmental surfaces should be wiped over using an S-shaped motion. This stops germs from being spread back over a spot that has just been cleaned. A disinfectant may be required if environmental surfaces are contaminated with blood, body fluids and germs.

There are two processes commonly used for environmental cleaning in the healthcare setting.

### 1. Two-step process

**Step 1**: All environmental surfaces are cleaned first with a neutral detergent and water to remove dirt and dust.
**Allow the surface to completely dry**.

**Step 2:** If the environmental surface has been contaminated with blood, body fluids and germs, clean the surface again with a disinfectant solution and **allow the surface to completely dry again.**

**OR**

### 2. Two-in-One-step process

A single cleaning solution that contains both a neutral detergent and a disinfectant is used to clean and disinfect environmental surfaces. After cleaning, **allow the surface to completely dry.**

## What products should you use to clean and disinfect?

All detergents and disinfectants used for environmental cleaning in the healthcare setting must be approved by the TGA for the cleaning and disinfection of hard surfaces.

### Detergent

- A neutral detergent helps to manually remove dirt, dust, blood, body fluids and germs
- Most hard surfaces can be cleaned well with detergent and warm water
- Routine cleaning should be done by wiping surfaces over by hand, using detergent and water.

### Disinfectant

- A disinfectant is a chemical that quickly kills most germs
- A disinfectant is always needed to clean surfaces and equipment between patients that have been contaminated with blood, body fluid or germs even if the surface looks visibly clean
- A disinfectant should only be used after cleaning away all dirt, dust, blood and body fluid with a neutral detergent, unless a combined detergent-disinfectant cleaning product is being used
- All surfaces need to dry to allow the detergent and disinfectant to kill the germs.

## When should you do environmental cleaning?

Environmental surfaces and equipment should always be cleaned if visibly dirty. Some areas need to be cleaned more often. These include **frequently touched surfaces** like door handles, bed rails, phone, taps and light switches. Other areas might need to be cleaned less often. These are usually **minimally touched surfaces** like floors, walls, ceilings, windows and blinds. See **Table 1** for examples of environmental surfaces and cleaning the recommended cleaning frequency.

Moisture, temperature, and light can cause some germs to stay on surfaces for a long time. The way you clean and how often you should clean is different depending on those risk factors.

Talk to your manager, or check the cleaning schedule for your healthcare setting if you need more information on when you should clean.

## What do you need to know about environmental cleaning?

This is an important job so you should be given training in environmental cleaning. You can expect to be trained in:

- The basics of infection prevention and control including how and when to do hand hygiene
- How to use personal protective equipment (PPE) safely including how to put on and take off PPE correctly
- How to use, handle and store detergent, disinfectant and other chemicals
- How to use the cleaning equipment safely
- How to clean the correct way in your workplace
- How to clean the cleaning equipment and when to change cleaning wipes
- The schedule of cleaning in your workplace.

## What should be in an environmental cleaning schedule?

Cleaning schedules will be different depending on the type of healthcare setting. Your employer will develop a cleaning schedule to manage the risk of infection associated with the services it provides. A cleaning schedule will consider:

- The infection risk level
- The type of activity in an area
- The level of activity undertaken.

For example, surfaces in a bathroom and kitchen area that are touched by many different people would need to be cleaned more frequently than the wall of a corridor or an office space used by one person.

Your workplace should:

- Identify which areas have a high or low risk of infection
- Train staff in how to use equipment, chemicals, and PPE,
- Develop a cleaning schedule and share it with cleaning staff.

An environmental cleaning schedule should give you:

- Information on the types of surfaces and areas to be cleaned
- The frequency that these surfaces and areas need to be cleaned
- The level of risk for infection from these surfaces or areas within the healthcare setting.

**Table 1:** Risk assessment and recommended cleaning frequency for environmental surfaces in healthcare settings

| Example | Risk Level | Cleaning frequency |
|---|---|---|
| **Frequently touched surfaces** | | |
| Patient areas and equipment, door handles, light switches, taps, hand rails | High | Daily or more often. For example:<br>• After each patient use<br>• Immediately after spills or contamination with blood, body fluid and germs |
| **Minimally touched surfaces** | | |
| Floors, walls, administrative areas | Low | Daily or less frequently as per the cleaning schedule.<br>Immediately after spills or contamination with blood, body fluid and germs |

## Questions?

**If you have any questions:**

- **Check your local policy for environmental cleaning procedures**
- **Ask you infection prevention and control team**
- **Ask your workplace manager for help.**

**Your safety is important!**

## Understanding risk levels for environmental cleaning

Different healthcare settings can provide a wide range of treatments and services across different departments. The risk of infection will change depending on the type of service and treatments being provided. **Table 2** provides examples of the levels of risk in different clinical and non-clinical areas in a healthcare setting. In general, environmental cleaning will need to be done more often in areas with a higher risk level.

**Table 2:** Risk assessment for different clinical and non-clinical settings

| Risk Level | Examples (includes connecting areas such as bathrooms, corridors, storerooms) |
|---|---|
| **Extreme** | • Operating theatres<br>• Intensive care units<br>• Emergency departments<br>• Labour and delivery wards<br>• Clinical areas with immunosuppressed patients |
| **High** | • General wards<br>• Outpatient clinics with treatment/ procedural rooms<br>• Emergency ambulances and other rescue vehicles |
| **Medium** | • Outpatient clinics, including consulting rooms and ambulatory care<br>• Residential accommodation<br>• Offices in patient and clinical areas<br>• Kitchenette, pantry, and other food preparation or storage areas |
| **Low** | • Office/administration areas |

# Environmental Cleaning

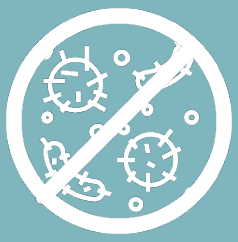
**Cleaners are *EXTREMELY* important to the safety and quality of this health service organisation.**
**Your work helps prevent the spread of disease in our healthcare settings and community.**

## What?

**Environmental cleaning removes dirt and germs from surfaces and equipment.**

## Why?

**Environmental cleaning stops germs from spreading.**



## How?

**Clean with neutral detergent first, use a disinfectant if needed, and**

**Always let surfaces completely dry after cleaning.**

## Where?

**All surfaces and more often for frequently touched surfaces like door handles and light switches.**

## When?

**Follow a cleaning schedule that is based on the infection *risk level.***

## Questions?

**Ask your manager. Your safety is important.**

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