

Control of Pandemic Flu Virus on Environmental Surfaces in Homes and Public Places

This fact sheet, from flu.gov, explains how cleaning and disinfecting surfaces in homes and public places (like schools and workplaces) can help to prevent the spread of pandemic influenza (flu).

How Flu Viruses Spread

- A flu pandemic is an outbreak of illness caused by a new flu virus that spreads around the world. Because the virus is new to people, nearly everyone will be at risk of getting it.
- The main way that illnesses like colds and flu are spread is from person to person by coughs and sneezes. This can happen when droplets from a cough or sneeze of an infected person move through the air and make contact with the mouth or nose of people nearby.
- Droplets from an infected person can also make contact with environmental surfaces (like the tops of tables). The virus can then be spread from those surfaces if a person touches the droplets and then touches his or her own eyes, mouth, or nose before washing his or her hands.
- The virus also can be spread when an infected person coughs or sneezes into his or her hands and then touches a surface (like a phone, remote control, or toy) before washing his or her hands. Another person could become sick if he or she touches that surface and then touches his or her own eyes, mouth, or nose before washing. Flu viruses and other germs can live 2 hours or longer on hard environmental surfaces like tables, doorknobs, and desks. Surfaces are likely to be touched much more often than they can be cleaned and disinfected. Thus, it is important to wash your hands often, keep your hands away from your face, and keep such surfaces clean to help prevent the spread of germs.

How to Stop the Spread of Pandemic Flu Virus from Environmental Surfaces

Use good hygiene practices!

- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze; put the used tissue in a waste basket and clean your hands.
- Cover your mouth and nose with your upper sleeve (not your hands) if you do not have a tissue and need to cough or sneeze.
- Clean your hands as soon as possible after coughing, sneezing, or blowing your nose.
- Use soap and water and wash your hands for 15 - 20 seconds; or use alcohol-based hand wipes or alcohol-based (60-95% alcohol) gel hand sanitizers; rub these on the hands until the liquid or gel dries.

- Clean your hands often when you or others are sick, especially if you touch your mouth, nose, and eyes. * Always clean your hands before eating.
- Carry alcohol-based hand wipes or alcohol-based (60-95% alcohol) hand-sanitizing gels with you to clean your hands when you are out in public.
- Teach your children to use these hygiene practices because germs are often spread at school.

Clean and disinfect hard surfaces and items in homes and schools.

- Follow label instructions carefully when using disinfectants and cleaners.
- Pay attention to any hazard warnings and instructions on the labels for using personal protective items (such as household gloves).
- Do not mix disinfectants and cleaners unless the labels indicate it is safe to do so. Combining certain products (such as chlorine bleach and ammonia cleaners) can be harmful, resulting in serious injury or death.
- Keep hard surfaces like kitchen countertops, tabletops, desktops, and bathroom surfaces clean and disinfected.
- Clean the surface with a commercial product that is both a detergent (cleans) and a disinfectant (kills germs). These products can be used when surfaces are not visibly dirty. Another way to do this is to wash the surface with a general household cleaner (soap or detergent), rinse with water, and follow with a disinfectant. This method should be used for visibly dirty surfaces.
- Use disinfectants on surfaces that are touched often. Clean the surface as explained above before using disinfectants.
- If disinfectants are not available, use a chlorine bleach solution made by adding 1 tablespoon of bleach to a quart (4 cups) of water; use a cloth to apply this to surfaces and let stand for 3 - 5 minutes before rinsing with clean water. (For a larger supply of disinfectant, add ¼ cup of bleach to a gallon [16 cups] of water.) Wear gloves to protect your hands when working with strong bleach solutions.
- Keep surfaces touched by more than one person clean and disinfected. Examples of these surfaces include doorknobs, refrigerator door handles, and microwaves.
- Clean with a combination detergent and disinfectant product. Or use a cleaner first, rinse the surface thoroughly, and then follow with a disinfectant.
- Use sanitizer cloths to wipe electronic items that are touched often, such as phones, computers, remote controls, and handheld games.
- Use sanitizer cloths to wipe car door handles, the steering wheel, and the gear shift.

Use recommended laundry practices

- Gently gather soiled clothing, bedding, and linens without creating a lot of motion or fluffing; for example, do not shake sheets when removing them from the bed.
- Clean your hands after handling soiled laundry items.
- Use washing machine cycles, detergents, and laundry additives (like softener) as you normally do; follow label instructions for detergents and additives.
- Dry the cleaned laundry items as you normally do, selecting the dryer temperature for the types of fabrics in the load. Line or air-drying can be used to dry items when machine drying is not indicated.
- Clean your hands before removing clean laundry from the washer or dryer, especially if you have coughed or sneezed on your hands.

Use recommended waste disposal practices

- Toss tissues into waste baskets after they have been used for coughs, sneezes, and blowing your nose.
- Place waste baskets where they are easy to use.
- Avoid touching used tissues and other waste when emptying waste baskets. * Clean your hands after emptying waste baskets.

Additional Information

- Disinfectant products (sanitizer cloths and liquid disinfectants), available from grocery stores, hardware stores, and commercial cleaning product suppliers have been registered with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Always follow label instructions carefully when using these products.
- For more information about EPA-registered disinfectants, visit epa.gov/oppad001/chemregindex.htm.
- For more information about cleaning and disinfection of surfaces to protect against pandemic influenza virus, consult “Interim Guidance on Environmental Management of Pandemic Influenza Virus.” To learn more about pandemic influenza, visit flu.gov

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