



health

Department:
Health
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Statement on cleaning and decontamination of workplaces in the context of COVID-19 (version 2: 10 August 2021)

(Document prepared by the Occupational Health and Safety Workstream of the
National Department of Health – Covid-19 Response)

Please note: This is an **interim guide** that may be updated as the outbreak in South Africa unfolds, to guide additional workforce preserving strategies.

With new variants of SARS-CoV-2 emerging it is important to constantly review and where relevant, revise procedures that have been previously proposed to ensure workplace readiness for variants. Employees with children need to also take additional precautionary actions due to the higher proportion of cases being reported in the age range 10 – 19 years since there has been a 64% increase in household transmission for the Delta variant compared to the Alpha variant.¹ The evidence that the Delta variant (B.1.617.2) spreads more easily in indoor environments², highlight the importance of non-pharmacological approaches such as social distancing, use of masks, hand sanitising and decontamination practises since the new variant poses an increased risk to unvaccinated and partially vaccinated people.³

Disinfection is recommended in indoor settings where there has been a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 within the last 24 hours.

One such measure that has been practised is that workplaces need to be “deep cleaned” before employees return to these workplaces, as well as for educators/teachers and administrative personnel and scholars returning to school or higher education institutions. Similar information has also been reported for decontamination of other areas of work in the public and private sector. Additionally, there has been confusion about the requirements for disinfection following identification of one or more cases at a workplace, with inconsistent practices and use of fogging and fumigation when not appropriate.

At the onset of the pandemic in 2020, it was recommended that “deep cleaning” is not a requirement for areas that were **unoccupied for more than one week**. The previous CDC guideline on cleaning and disinfecting school and community facilities stated that no cleaning and disinfection is required for areas if the person that was diagnosed with COVID-19 did not visit or use the facility for more than 7 days.⁴ A WHO report also stated that the SARS-CoV-2 virus has been detected on surfaces up to 72 hours under experimental conditions.⁵ It is unclear from this report whether it was viable SARS-CoV-2 or genetic material of the virus, the latter not being regarded as being infectious. An updated and more recent CDC science brief has reported that transmission is minor after 3 days in an indoor space after a person that tested positive for SARS-CoV-2 occupied the indoor space.⁶ It is therefore recommended that there is **NO need to “deep clean” or implement any other form of cleaning** in areas that were unoccupied for more than 3 days.

Procedures for ‘deep cleaning’ may have emanated from the requirement published in the COVID-19 Disease: Infection Prevention and Control Guidelines of the Department of Health that stated “*cleaning the environment is paramount*”⁷ and the procedure to deep clean the environment is described in the Practical Manual for Implementation of the National Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) Strategic Framework.^{7,8} However, this requirement is primarily for a specific area in the work environment that was occupied by a person who was diagnosed with COVID-19 to enable reoccupation of the affected area as soon as possible for essential services to resume.⁹ Deep cleaning involves cleaning walls, ventilation shafts and grills and storage areas, floors, windows, ceilings, etc in all clinical and non-clinical areas. In area/s where a person was tested positive for COVID-19, an incident-based risk assessment approach, as specified in the Department of Employment and Labour’s Direction¹⁰ and the Department of Health’s Guideline,¹¹ needs to be followed. If the individual merely ‘passed through’ the workplace without touching anything and without spending much time in face-to-face communication with other employees, then simple manual surface cleaning measures would be appropriate. However, if the individual spent a considerable amount of time in the workplace, touched and handled many objects, equipment and surfaces and had close contact with several fellow workers, then more comprehensive manual surface cleaning of the environment would be warranted. **The Department of Health does not endorse or require ‘deep cleaning’ that involves fumigation, demisting or fogging.** Nor does the Department of Health require such a ‘certificate of cleaning’.

References

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