

CLEANING AND DISINFECTION IN SCHOOLS

Last update: August 16, 2022

Cleaning and disinfection standards and protocols in schools are guided by Ontario's Ministry of Education and infection prevention and control best practices. Additional cleaning and disinfection measures may be advised by York Region Public Health during an outbreak or a period of increased absenteeism. Please visit [York.ca/InfectionPrevention](https://york.ca/InfectionPrevention) for updates.

Cleaning and disinfection general guidance

Cleaning and disinfection are two separate processes:

- **Cleaning:** physically removes dirt
- **Disinfection:** kills most microorganisms that are found on the surface

Cleaning must be done prior to disinfection to allow disinfectants to work effectively. Some products can perform both functions within the same step.

For proper disinfection to take place, it is important for surfaces to stay wet for the duration of time required by the manufacturer, known as contact time. Staff should use appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) in accordance with their occupational health and safety policies.

Some other important considerations:

- Use disinfectant products with a Drug Identification Number (DIN)
- Check the expiry date of all products used
- Follow manufacturer's instructions for correct dilution
- Wear appropriate PPE as indicated by product instructions and/or organization policy and procedures
- Clean in one direction – from clean to dirty
- Allow surface to dry before applying disinfectant
- If using a cloth and disinfectant solution in a bucket, do not "double-dip" a used cloth back into the clean disinfectant solution as it will contaminate the solution
- If using spray bottles to apply cleaning or disinfectant products, avoid aerosolization by saturating the cloth with the product using the stream/squirt function (not a fine spray)
- Use a high-level disinfectant (i.e., a disinfectant with a kill claim against mycobacteria, enveloped and non-enveloped viruses and fungi) in all affected areas where the symptomatic individuals were present (including bathrooms and frequently touched items/surfaces) and when there's increased absenteeism or when an outbreak has been declared

PUBLIC HEALTH

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york.ca/infectionprevention



High-touch versus low-touch surfaces

Surfaces within the school environment are generally divided into high-touch surfaces and low-touch surfaces, depending on how frequently they are touched. As per the Ministry of Education, high-touch surfaces should be cleaned and disinfected at a minimum once daily. The frequency may be increased if surfaces are more frequently used or are visibly soiled. Other surfaces may be cleaned and disinfected in accordance with a routine cleaning schedule. It is important to review communication from the Ministry of Education on a regular basis for any updates to requirements.

General guidance for shared objects

Shared objects should be cleaned and disinfected as part of the school's routine cleaning schedule. As per the Ministry of Education, frequently touched or shared objects should follow the minimum once daily cleaning and disinfection frequency if they are considered high-touch surfaces. Frequency should be increased if the object is more frequently used or is visibly soiled.

As much as possible, choose equipment with hard, non-porous, and wipeable surfaces so it can be easily cleaned and disinfected. For items that cannot withstand cleaning and disinfection, such as puzzles, papers, and books, dedicate the items to each student where possible. As an additional prevention measure, students should practice proper respiratory etiquette and perform hand hygiene before and after use of shared items.

Additional considerations for some shared objects

There are shared objects within some parts of the school environment, such as kindergarten classrooms and special education/community classrooms, where additional cleaning and disinfection recommendations apply. These include, but are not limited to, items used for sensory play, such as playdough, sand, food products, and water, plush/cloth objects and objects that may be mouthed.

As these objects are often intended for use among young children, it is important that they are inspected as part of the cleaning and disinfection procedure to ensure there are no loose parts or broken/jagged edges that could pose a safety hazard.

OBJECTS THAT ARE MOUTHED

Objects that are mouthed should be dedicated to each student where possible. If shared, they require cleaning and disinfection after each use. These objects are to be thoroughly rinsed with potable water following disinfection.

PLUSH OR CLOTH OBJECTS

The use of plush or cloth objects should be minimized where possible due to difficulty in cleaning and disinfection, and the risk of mould when wet. If used, these objects should be dedicated to each student when possible and be laundered onsite weekly at minimum and whenever visibly soiled.

Laundering of these items should be done in separate cycles from environmental cleaning items, such as cleaning cloths and mop heads. Ensure objects are taken out of the washer as soon as possible and

are thoroughly dried after laundering. Objects should be discarded if heavily soiled with blood or body fluids.

SENSORY PLAY

Individual sensory play bins and materials dedicated to each student is encouraged. If items and equipment are shared for sensory play, refer to the [York Region Sensory Play](#) resource for guidance on hand hygiene, as well as on the selection, cleaning and disinfection of various items. Ensure any sensory play items that were in use prior to an outbreak or during a period of increased absenteeism are discarded, including playdough and dried food items.

Students are encouraged to practice regular hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette throughout the day.

Additional resources

- [Preventing Infections](#) website
- [Cleaning and Disinfection](#) poster
- [York Region Toy Cleaning and Disinfecting – Information Guide](#)
- [Best practices for environmental cleaning for prevention and control of infections in all health care settings](#) - Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion (PHO), Provincial Infectious Diseases Advisory Committee (2018)

If you have any questions about infection prevention and control measures, please call Health Connection 1-800-361-5653; TTY (for the deaf or hard of hearing): 1-866-252-9933; or email Health.Inspectors@york.ca