

Facility Management Reopening Tip Sheet

20 May 2020

What to Ask Your Cleaning Provider about the Reopening Cleaning Tactics They Recommend

As you reopen your facility after COVID-19-related closures, your employees, occupants, and customers will want reassurance you have done the best possible to reduce the risk of contracting the virus in your building(s). As you evaluate what increased cleaning you may want to employ within your facility, there are a few tips to consider.

First, there are many people selling disinfecting and non-specific, non-defined “deep cleaning” services that might seem like a possible solution to show your occupants that you did something different. Unless there were known cases of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, the cause of the COVID-19 disease, such activities can be more than you require. The misuse of disinfectants also could lead to a further inflated shortage of this critical resource.

If your facility has not had a known case of COVID-19 within the last 14 days, or has been closed for longer than that, it is very likely that any errant strains of the virus are deactivated simply due to time, if there even was any in your facility.

Therefore, the level of cleaning needed to prepare for re-opening could be nothing more than what you would do prior to a normal grand opening. How is that determined? It will require you to do a risk assessment for your location in coordination with your cleaning provider.

Once open, ongoing cleaning and, if needed, disinfecting, to minimise the increased risk of cross-contamination while the pandemic is still a reality is recommended. Many governments have stated that employers operating workplaces during the COVID-19 pandemic should continue routine cleaning and other housekeeping practices in their facilities. Employers who need to clean and disinfect environments potentially contaminated with SARS-CoV-2 should use registered disinfectants with label claims to be effective against an enveloped coronavirus.

ISSA, the worldwide cleaning industry association, and its Global Biorisk Advisory Council (GBAC) advocate for what they call “confidence cleaning” — a process involving proper risk assessment, followed by implementing all necessary steps for cleaning and, if needed, disinfection, providing assurance that the cleaned area is safe for use and occupancy. This process also requires proper training of all cleaning staff on the determined steps needed, the steps taken, the frequency, the tools used and personal protective equipment (PPE) required. In addition to making the best choices for the facility’s needs, confidence is created among your stakeholders because you properly communicate to them about these activities implemented to protect them. See ISSA’s position paper “Preparing Your Facility to Make a Clean Start,” for more details.

Further levels of professional disinfection or decontamination could be needed if known cases emerge in your facility. Therefore, as part of your risk assessment, ask your provider to explain what levels of cleaning they identify for normal, heightened awareness and infected surface decontamination scenarios, as well as their protocols and training for each level. Then you can better understand which level of service is in line with your risk assessment, and you can have greater confidence that they are prepared to help you step up measures if the virus is confirmed in your facility. ISSA recommends that your cleaning provider should have at least one person who has gone through the GBAC Fundamentals course to understand what biorisk professionals recommend be considered when creating cleaning and disinfecting protocols for COVID-19.

Understanding Levels of Cleaning

It helps to know the difference between the levels of cleaning that you are requesting, to ensure you get what you really need in your facility. This is the definition of the four main categories:

Cleaning: The removal of "soil" such as dust, dirt, and debris. Often it can provide a 90% reduction in disease-causing germs. Cleaning prepares a surface or item for disinfection.

Sanitising: Sanitising lowers the level of biological agents on an object to a safe level. Known as a 99.9% 3-log reduction of disease-causing germs, leaving behind a small amount of germs deemed safe by health codes. It is gentler than disinfecting and, in the case of SARS-CoV-2 virus, it is not known if this activity is enough to deactivate the virus, which is why disinfecting is recommended.

Disinfecting: A process that eliminates many or all pathogenic microorganisms, except bacterial spores, on inanimate objects. In Europe, it is known as a 5-log reduction, or 99.999%, of disease-causing germs, while in the United States it requires a minimum 6-log reduction, or 99.9999%. This is the recommended level of approach by most government authorities to address the SARS-CoV-2 virus. Check with your government to determine which log reduction it stipulates.

Sterilisation: Is the complete elimination of microbial viability. This process will destroy or eliminate all forms of microbial life. The methods of sterilisation include physical methods and chemical methods. Physical methods include dry heat, steam, or radiation. This is commonly reserved for surgical, or sensitive research and development environments, but is not recommended for routine commercial environments, therefore it is highly unlikely you need such levels in your facility to address the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

Ask the Right Questions

Here are further tips to consider when asking your in-house or outsourced cleaning provider to prepare your facility for reopening and for ongoing confidence cleaning once you return to business. The answers to these questions are important to your own risk assessment:

- Ask what method and product they recommend using, how and why they plan to use it in your facility.
- Is the chemical or technique they are recommending registered with your national authority for the use they are suggesting?
- Always ask for a safety data sheet and copy of usage instructions. Any chemical or technique inconsistent with the manufacturer's recommendations could cause harm to users, surfaces and occupants.
- Does the manufacturer recommend the chemical or technique for the specific surface types in your facility? Some options might be useful on certain surfaces but could damage others.
- Before use in front of occupants or visitors, is the chemical or technique recommended to be used in an occupied or unoccupied area? Also, do you have the proper ventilation required for the cleaning technique proposed, to ensure cleaning workers and occupants will not be negatively impacted?
- Always ask for claims of efficacy in writing and be cautious of verbal claims.
- Ask for proof that the people executing cleaning tactics in your facility are trained in the use of technology, the correct use of PPE required and that if there is risk of exposure to human blood or bodily fluids or other potentially infectious materials that they have training in the proper work practices required.
- All workers should be trained about the sources of exposure to the SARS-CoV-2 virus, the hazards associated with that exposure, and appropriate workplace protocols in place to prevent or reduce the likelihood of exposure.

- If specific training documentation is not available for the people assigned to your facility, then ask for documentation about the provider's general staff training programme and requirements as it pertains to the tasks they will use in your facility.
- Because many companies have popped up, offering services without having done them before, ask for references of customers they have done this type of cleaning/disinfecting for before.

Vetting Chemical or Technology Claims

Note that some chemicals or techniques have positive kill claims for bacteria, however, a virus is not the same as a bacterium. It is not a living organism and, therefore, cannot be killed. Instead, it can be deactivated. Therefore, the efficacy of that approach may not be the same when trying to deactivate the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

First, look for the chemical's virucidal claims and registrations. Then look to see if the manufacturer has made the claim if they have shown in the past that the chemical can deactivate viruses that are much harder to destroy than, for example, enveloped coronaviruses, which are similar to SARS-CoV-2. This is called the "emerging viral pathogens claim." This is because SARS-CoV-2 is a new virus and any testing requires access to the virus (commercially) which will take considerable time, limiting which technology can make claims related to this specific virus.

Many countries around the world are expediting their review and registration processes to help increase access to disinfectants that can meet growing demand. Therefore, if certain products have shown efficacy in deactivating other human coronaviruses to SARS-CoV-2, your governing body may allow that they can therefore be considered effective against SARS-CoV-2, based on their chemistry and effectiveness against SARS and MERS.

If a chemical or technology is not approved by the appropriate regulatory agency in your country for use against coronaviruses or against emerging pathogens, or has a similar exemption at this point, that use is inconsistent with its labelling and ISSA/GBAC cannot recommend it.

Some cleaning providers claim that their treatments or tactics can "COVID-19-proof" your facility for up to a certain number of days. Check if such treatments are government registered and do the government approved labels or documentation state this specific claim related to SARS-CoV-2?

The reality of cleaning any surface is that it is clean until the next outside influence touches that surface, transferring anything that may be on that person's hands or on that item that is deposited on that surface. The more outside influences that touch that surface, the higher the likelihood that dirt and other biomatter could be transferred to it.

There are some surface coatings that use special chemistry, nanotechnology, and other science to degrade biomatter or repel debris that tries to adhere to them, however, they cannot guarantee that your facility will be virus-free. They can help to minimise the risk, like other cleaning techniques. To determine how much they can minimise the risk, and on which surfaces, refer to the above list of questions you can ask about the technology. And note that even such coatings still need to be cleaned to allow them to be most effective.

Some providers may offer techniques that have been proven useful in the treatment of air or water. You must ask whether the same efficacy information is available for their use on your specific surfaces. The use is not always the

same. For instance, a technique that uses light, needs to make sure the light reaches all areas and surfaces for a prescribed amount of time. While it is easy to pass air or water under a light in a regulated and consistent manner, if furniture or other objects are in a room, then the light cannot reach all the surfaces equally, therefore not sanitising or disinfecting those surfaces consistently.

Some treatments for air, water or acute decontamination scenarios can use chemistry that can be caustic for surfaces or skin, posing greater risks outside of their intended use. When evaluating these technologies, consider if your specific facility use is similar enough to those where they have been effective, and if you are able to minimise the risks they may pose when used on a more routine and broad basis.

As with any claims that have health and infection-control impact, common sense and asking the right questions will help you to more easily determine if they are the right choice for your facility. Sometimes a very effective technology can be available, but it also may not be practical for the size, scope, traffic patterns or ventilation of the facility you manage. Or, the technology is effective, but the cleaning staff may not have access to the proper personal protective equipment (PPE) to safely use that option. Therefore, you may need to switch to a tactic that has lower risk for workers who will not be wearing the missing PPE.

All such factors need to be taken into consideration to find the best combination for your needs.

For specific training regarding soil removal and disinfecting processes, safe chemical use, and specific steps to take, contact emea@issa.com for ISSA's Cleaning Management Institute Basics training, the specialised GBAC Fundamentals Online Course: Microbial Warrior Workshop, or ISSA's IEHA Frontline training for healthcare or hospitality facilities. [VISIT THE GBAC TRAINING AND EVENTS PAGE](#)

Previous Tip Sheets:

- Tip Sheet: [Personal Protective Equipment](#)
- Tip Sheet: [Risk Assessment](#)
- Tip Sheet: [How to Clean & Disinfect Commercial Cleaning Equipment](#)
- Tip Sheet: [How to Clean & Disinfect Healthcare Environments](#)

Other links of interest:

- [Coronavirus: Prevention and Control for the Cleaning Industry](#)
- [World Health Organisation \(Who\) Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\) pandemic](#)

About ISSA

As the leading trade association for the cleaning industry worldwide, ISSA is committed to helping its members change the way the world views cleaning. The association provides members with the business tools they need to promote cleaning as an investment in human health, the environment, and an improved bottom line. For more information about ISSA's Europe, Middle East and Africa regional support, visit www.issa.com/emea or send an email to emea@issa.com.

About GBAC

ISSA's Global Biorisk Advisory Council is comprised of international leaders in the field of microbial-pathogenic threat analysis, mitigation, response and recovery. GBAC provides training, guidance, certification, crisis management, assistance and leadership to government, commercial and private entities looking to mitigate, quickly address biological threats and real-time crises, and/or recover from such events. For more information about ISSA's GBAC division, visit www.gbac.org.