



health

Department:  
Health  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

## **CLEANING AND DECONTAMINATION OF WORKPLACES IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19 (10 June 2020)**

**(Statement prepared by the Occupational Health and Safety academic group within the  
Occupational Health and Safety Workstream – Covid-19 Response)**

With the further relaxation of the lockdown levels in the country, there have been a number of procedures that have been proposed to ensure workplace readiness for this change. One such measure has been 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.

This disinfection procedure is however not a requirement for areas that were **unoccupied for more than one week**. The CDC guideline on cleaning and disinfecting school and community facilities states 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.<sup>4</sup> A WHO report that the SARS-CoV-2 virus responsible for the development of COVID-19 has been detected on surfaces up to 72 hours under experimental conditions.<sup>5</sup> It is unclear from this report whether it was viable SARS-CoV-2 viruses or genetic material of the SARS-CoV-2 that is not regarded as being infectious. 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 7 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*”<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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 Direction<sup>6</sup> and the Department of Health’s Guideline<sup>7</sup>, need 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**

1. COVID-19 Disease: Infection Prevention and Control Guidelines (Ver 1) of April 2020. <http://www.health.gov.za/index.php/antimicrobial-resistance/category/629-infection-prevention-and-control-documents>
2. National Department of Health. National Practical Manual for the Implementation of the National Strategic Framework, March 2020. Available from: (<http://www.health.gov.za/index.php/antimicrobial-resistance/category/629-infectionprevention-and-control-documents>)
3. COVID-19, Environmental Health Guidelines, Department of Health. 16 March 2020. <https://www.nicd.ac.za/diseases-a-z-index/covid-19/covid-19-guidelines/>
4. Cleaning and disinfecting school and community facilities: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html>. Accessed 28 May 2020
5. Cleaning and disinfection of environmental surfaces in the context of COVID-19. Interim guidance. 15 May 2020, <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/332096> (Accessed May 20, 2020)
6. National Department of Employment and Labour. Consolidated COVID -19 Direction on Health and Safety in the Workplace. 4 June 2020, <http://www.nioh.ac.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/C19-OHS-Directives-June-2020.pdf>
7. National Department of Health. Guidance note for workplaces in the event of identification of a COVID-19 positive employee (V5: 14 May 2020). Available from: ([http://www.nioh.ac.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/guidelines\\_positive\\_worker\\_19\\_May\\_20.pdf](http://www.nioh.ac.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/guidelines_positive_worker_19_May_20.pdf))