

COVID-19 (Novel Coronavirus) Contaminated Surfaces

Reducing the risk of COVID-19 virus transmission through contaminated surfaces

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Key Points

- Although possible, the likelihood of COVID-19 being transmitted through contaminated surfaces is low.
 - The likelihood may increase if the item was handled by someone who recently tested positive for COVID-19.
 - Quarantining of items is usually not required, but there are exceptions.
 - Infection control measures, especially keeping your hands clean, play a much larger role in reducing the spread of COVID-19.
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Guidance

This guidance reflects the current need for protection from COVID-19 in Ontario. The COVID-19 pandemic continues to evolve, and this guidance is subject to change. Please visit the Southwestern Public Health website www.swpublichealth.ca regularly for updates and additional information.

Overview

COVID-19 transmission and survival on surfaces:

- COVID-19 is **spread mainly** through droplets or aerosols released when an infected person talks, coughs, sneezes, sings or breathes. These infectious droplets or aerosols can easily spread to others when they are inhaled or reach the nose, mouth or eyes of people in poorly ventilated spaces or in close contact.
- Although **unlikely**, it appears possible to get the virus by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and touching your mouth, nose or eyes immediately after without washing your hands.
- The COVID-19 virus appears to survive on surfaces ranging from several hours to days, but the research continues to evolve.

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- **Frequently touched surfaces** are more likely to become contaminated with the virus and may include:
 - Tables
 - Phones
 - Handrails
 - Doorknobs
 - Credit cards
 - Countertops
 - Light switches
 - Faucet handles
 - Steering wheels
 - Cabinet handles
 - Elevator buttons
- Other items that are less likely to cause transmission but can still become contaminated include books, paper, packages, fabric and clothing.
- The likelihood of transmission through contaminated surfaces may increase if there is a higher viral load on that surface. For example, surfaces in a space where an infected individual has been.

Reducing Personal Risk of Contracting COVID-19 From Contaminated Surfaces:

- Take precautions as any surface has the potential to be contaminated:
 - **Wash your hands** often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
 - Consistently perform proper hand hygiene after touching or handling frequently touched surfaces (e.g., payment machines, elevator buttons), especially when outside of your household (e.g., at the grocery store, at a place of worship, at work or school etc.).
 - To avoid moving the virus from a contaminated surface onto yourself, avoid touching your mouth, eyes, or nose.
 - **Properly use face coverings**
- When in public spaces, limit touching communal items wherever possible (e.g., avoid passing items like a pen back and forth between people from outside of your household, use touchless payment options, pick up only what you intend to buy).
- Regularly **clean and disinfect your household**, especially if people outside your household have spent time in your home.
- When entering public facilities like fitness centres, grocery stores etc., wash your hands frequently and be aware of and follow all infection prevention and control procedures and requirements.

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- If you are caring for a person with COVID-19 at home where the viral load is likely to be higher, follow this [advice](#) to protect yourself and others in the home.

Recommendations for Reducing the Risk of Transmission From Contaminated Surfaces At the Source (e.g. in your business, organization, or service area):

- Follow all pertinent Ministry of Health and/or workplace guidance documents. Go to [COVID-19 Resources for Workplaces and Employers](#) for details.
- Infection prevention and control measures that play a large role in reducing the contamination of surfaces include:
 - Following [cleaning and disinfection procedures](#).
 - Ensuring hand sanitizer availability,
 - Enforcing [mandatory face covering requirements](#).
 - Conducting [COVID-19 screening](#) of all staff and customers (where applicable).
- Unless expressly stated in your business, organization or service area guidance document to quarantine items, quarantining of items is **not** required.
- If your business-specific guidance document suggests a 'wait-time' between the sharing of materials that are difficult to clean and sanitize (e.g., porous or fragile materials such as books, paper, cardboard puzzles, fabric and clothing), but is not explicit with how long to wait, current research suggests a 3-day wait time.

References:

[Rapid Review: What is known about how long the virus can survive with potential for infection on surfaces?](#)

[Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\): Prevention and risks](#)

[COVID-19 Routes of Transmission--What We Know So Far](#)

[Coronavirus disease 2019 \(COVID-19\): Epidemiology, virology, and prevention](#)