

Proper Cleaning and Disinfecting of Surfaces For Non-Clinical Settings May 1, 2009

Spread of the H1N1 influenza A virus is thought to be happening in the same way that seasonal flu spreads. Flu viruses are spread mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing of people with influenza. Sometimes people may become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose.

Environmental sanitation cannot substitute for personal hygiene. There are everyday actions that can help prevent the spread of germs that cause respiratory illnesses like influenza. Take these everyday steps to protect your health:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you get sick with influenza, stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.

However, the following guidance may be followed to clean and disinfect hard surfaces and items in homes and schools and similar environments:

- Follow label instructions carefully when using disinfectants and cleaners.
 - Pay attention to any hazard warnings and instructions on the labels for using personal protective items (such as household gloves).
 - Do not mix disinfectants and cleaners unless the labels indicate it is safe to do so. Combining certain products (such as chlorine bleach and ammonia cleaners) can be harmful, resulting in serious injury or death.
- Keep hard surfaces like kitchen countertops, tabletops, desktops, and bathroom surfaces clean and disinfected.
 - Clean the surface with a commercial product that is both a detergent (cleans) and a disinfectant (kills germs). These products can be used when surfaces are not visibly dirty.
 - Another way to do this is to wash the surface with a general household cleaner (soap or detergent), rinse with water, and follow with a disinfectant. This method should be used for visibly dirty surfaces.

- Use disinfectants on surfaces that are touched often. Clean the surface as explained above before using disinfectants.
 - If disinfectants are not available, use a chlorine bleach solution made by adding 1 tablespoon of bleach to a quart (4 cups) of water; use a cloth to apply this to surfaces and let stand for 3 – 5 minutes before rinsing with clean water. (For a larger supply of disinfectant, add ¼ cup of bleach to a gallon [16 cups] of water.)
 - Wear gloves to protect your hands when working with strong bleach solutions.
- Keep surfaces touched by more than one person clean and disinfected. Examples of these surfaces include doorknobs, refrigerator door handles, and microwaves.
 - Clean with a combination detergent and disinfectant product. Or use a cleaner first, rinse the surface thoroughly, and then follow with a disinfectant.
 - Use sanitizer cloths to wipe electronic items that are touched often, such as phones, computers, remote controls, and hand-held games.
 - Use sanitizer cloths to wipe car door handles, the steering wheel, and the gear shift.

References:

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *H1N1 Flu (Swine Flu) and You*, http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/swineflu_you.htm, May 1, 2009
2. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, PandemicFlu.gov, <http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/individual/panfacts.html>, May 1, 2009.