

Germs are all around us in the environment. Most of them are harmless, and some are even good for you. However, some germs can cause disease. These are the germs we want to clean off surfaces. Cleaning can break the chain of infection.

Cleaning

Cleaning is an action that uses detergent, water and friction to physically remove dirt and germs from a surface. It does not kill all germs, but it reduces their numbers to reduce the risk of spreading infection.

What makes cleaning work?

- Detergent – breaks down dirt and oils
- Water – lifts dirt off surfaces so it can be rinsed away
- Rubbing – detaches dirt, grease, and germs from surfaces and breaks the structure of the germs



Disinfection

Disinfection is using chemicals to kill most of the germs that remain on a surface after it has been cleaned.

Cleaning **before** disinfection is important as dirt can make the disinfectant less able to kill germs.



Warning! Disinfectants are strong, irritating chemicals. Cleaning is usually enough.



Routine cleaning

- This is standard cleaning with detergent and water that prevents dirt and grime building up. Schedules include more frequent routine cleaning for high-traffic areas.
- Many industries (e.g. healthcare, childcare, meatworks, hairdressers) have legislated cleaning and disinfection standards you need to follow.

Additional cleaning

- This is the additional cleaning and disinfection done during an outbreak such as gastro.

Soft furnishings

For soft furnishings such as armchairs and carpets, regular vacuuming and occasional steam cleaning is advised.



Tips for cleaning

- First, declutter and remove waste
- Pay attention to frequently touched surfaces
- Clean areas or surfaces in this order:
 1. clean to dirty
 2. high to low
- Wipe in one direction: up and down, not in circles, which spreads germs back onto clean areas
- Fold cleaning cloths into 4 or 8 using a clean side for each new surface.

Tips for disinfecting

- Use chemicals correctly according to manufacturer instructions
- Surfaces must be clean and dry so the disinfectant can work
- You may need to wear PPE to protect yourself from some chemicals

The cleaning cupboard

The cupboard or storeroom should have the cleaning schedule and a safety data sheet for each chemical. It should be well ventilated and all wet equipment should be clean and dried after each use and kept off the floor.

This is a summary of the *Cleaning* in the Department of Health's Infection Prevention and Control eLearning series. Access this and other modules in the series at

www.vicniss.org.au/resources/ipc-elearning-modules/

