

## Cleaning and Disinfection in Schools and Colleges Post COVID-19: Joint NASUWT/Safer Disinfection Network Guidance

The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated in sharp relief the inadequacies of cleaning and disinfection routines in many schools and colleges. Better hygiene awareness and effective disinfectant products are crucial in any workplace setting with shared spaces, including schools and colleges, to limit the spread of infectious diseases.

Viral illnesses have a significant direct and indirect impact on the schools and colleges that burdens employers with increased healthcare costs, low productivity, and absenteeism. Pupil absence impacts on their educational progress and the overall standards of the school/college.

Direct contact between people and contact with contaminated surfaces contributes to the spread of viruses in schools and colleges. There is a wealth of clinical evidence showing that the use of surface disinfection products, as well as hand sanitiser, can reduce the risk of virus spread in all workplace settings, and cleaning and disinfection plays a vital role in reducing the spread of infectious diseases.

Viruses such as SARS-CoV-2, influenza and norovirus are known to spread by touching contaminated surfaces and then touching the face. From picking up objects to turning doorknobs, staff and pupils are constantly touching surfaces in shared spaces that are potentially contaminated with pathogens from when individuals' cough or sneeze. This leads to huge numbers of avoidable infections every year which has a significant impact on the operation of the setting and the education provision for pupils.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the importance of appropriate hygiene measure and although the pandemic is hopefully drawing to a close, the virus itself will be present and is likely to cause illness indefinitely, and other viruses such as influenza and norovirus are likely to cause significant outbreaks as they have done previously. For a whole range of factors, it is important that cleaning and disinfection routines do not fall back into pre-2020 habits.

Current Government guidance does not go far enough to highlight the importance of surface cleaning and disinfection and ensure the most suitable products are being made available. It is possible, within the current regulatory framework, for products that are marketed and sold in the UK to make inaccurate or misleading claims about the level of protection they provide, and schools and colleges could be wasting money on products that are not fit for purpose.

It is also important to be clear that cleaning (the removal of dirt etc.) is not the same as disinfection (the killing of pathogens) and for effective disinfection to take place, surfaces must also be clean.

The NASUWT and the Safer Disinfection Network (SDN) strongly recommend the following:

- Schools and colleges should be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected at least once per day, using combined detergent and disinfectant products that conform to be tested to the EN 14476 standard for virucidal efficacy.
- Additional cleaning and disinfection should be focused on frequently touched surfaces and shared spaces – door handles, handrails, chairs/arm rests, communal eating areas, sink and toilet facilities.

- If equipment (for example, science or IT apparatus) or desks are shared, they should ideally be cleaned and disinfected after each use. The onus must not fall on teaching staff to ensure this takes place.
- All staff should have access to disinfectant products that are tested to the EN 14476 standard for their own reassurance cleaning/disinfection.
- Hand sanitiser should be provided for staff and students to use at entrances and exits and in communal and work areas.

Where members have concerns that these recommendations are not being followed, they should raise it in the first instance with their line manager/NASUWT Workplace Representative. If concerns persist, member should contact the NASUWT for further advice.

### **About the Safer Disinfectant Network**

The SDN is a collaboration of infection prevention and control experts, doctors, nurses and cleaning/disinfectant product manufacturers, committed to promoting best practice to support public health.



[advice@mail.nasuwt.org.uk](mailto:advice@mail.nasuwt.org.uk)  
[www.nasuwt.org.uk](http://www.nasuwt.org.uk)