



Workplace Cleanliness & Hygiene

Coronavirus (COVID-19): Workplace Cleanliness & Hygiene

COVID-19 is a **health and safety risk**. Employers and other duty holders (**such as property managers/owners**) have obligations to ensure the health and safety of workers and others. They **must have a plan** on what will be done to protect and support workers, and health and safety representatives (HSRs) **must be consulted on this plan**.

Your health and safety rights

Every worker has the right to healthy and safe work. **Elected Health and Safety Representatives [HSRs]** also have powers and rights under health and safety law.

If you feel immediately unsafe at work, you can stop the unsafe work – but you must be available for other safe duties. **Before taking this action, talk to your union delegate and HSR.**

HSRs have the power to direct work to cease if there is an immediate or imminent risk to health and safety. Everyone must be available to perform alternate safe duties and if they can, HSRs must try to consult with management before issuing the cases work. HSRs may also Issue a Provisional Improvement Notice (PIN) requiring the PCBU/employer to take certain actions. HSRs must have consulted with the PCBU/employer about the health and safety issue.

Under WHS law these rights exist only after the HSR has attended an approved training course. So, training is essential. In Victoria HSRs have these rights as soon as they are elected, regardless of whether they have been trained.

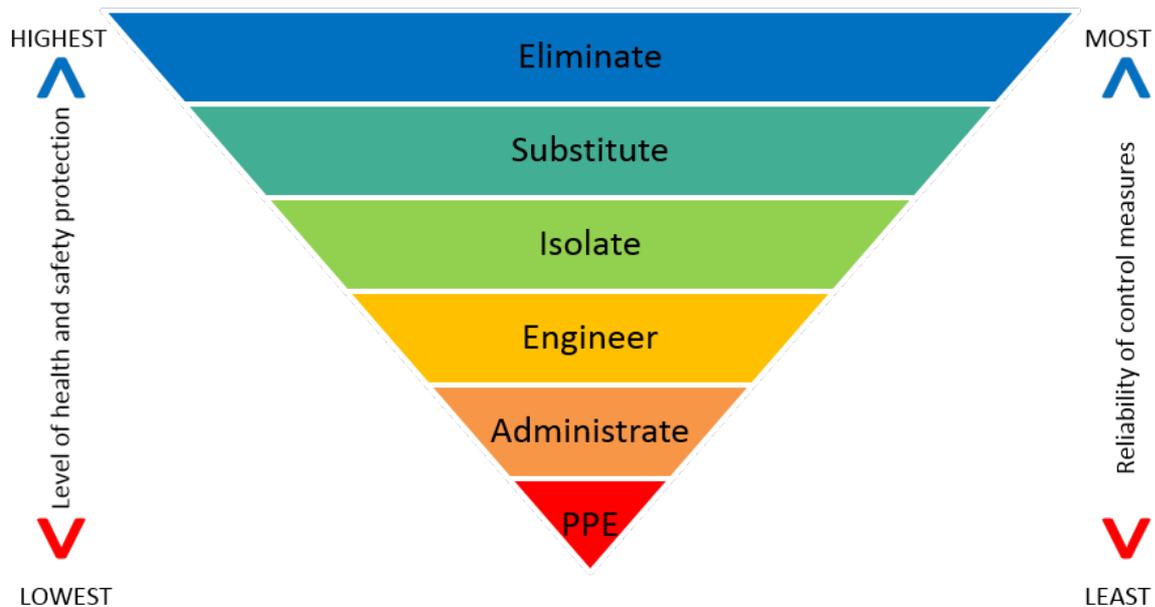
Hierarchy of Control

As with any other risk, employers/PCBUs must consider how to implement the most reliable ways to prevent harm. This should involve the application of the **hierarchy of controls** (refer to the diagram below). The hierarchy of controls requires priority to be placed on the elimination of hazards, or isolation of people from exposure to harm where possible. Lower order administrative controls which focus on individual worker behaviours or the application of PPE should only be applied where higher order controls are not possible or effective.

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Applying the hierarchy of controls to COVID-19 may require multiple measures to be implemented in a workplace.

The best risk control measure for preventing exposure to COVID-19 is physical distancing¹, together with other measures, such as cleaning and improved hygiene.

Why Cleaning is Important

Cleaning is important as the virus which causes COVID-19 can survive on hard surfaces for a few days. The virus is then transferred from a person's hands to their face and it is then breathed in.

Removal of the virus that causes COVID-19 requires thorough **cleaning** followed by **disinfection**.

The mechanical process of cleaning removes dirt and grime. This needs to be done with a detergent solution (as per manufacturer's instructions). Detergent-impregnated wipes may be used but should not be used as a replacement for the mechanical cleaning process.

¹ [Click here](#) to view the ACTU's Coronavirus (COVID-19) advice on physical distancing.



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Following cleaning with detergents, disinfectants are used to kill the virus. Disinfectant may not kill the virus if the surface has not been cleaned with detergent first.

There are very clear guidelines for cleaning in health settings which can be accessed by [clicking here](#).

Safe Work Australia information adapts that information for workplaces and what cleaning to do if there is a suspected or confirmed case of COVID 19. [Click here](#) to access guidance which will help determine the appropriate level of cleaning.

Where to clean

This information is to assist workers and HSRs, when consulting with employers/PCBUs about what areas need to be cleaned.

Routinely clean frequently touched hard surfaces – these are a few examples to prompt thinking about which surfaces are most commonly touched in your workplace:

- door handles, handrails, trolleys
- light switches
- bench, desk and tabletops
- frequently touched handles on machinery, tools and equipment
- steering wheels, control panels
- washing facilities, taps.

Workplaces should clean surfaces at least daily or in between changes of shift or when new workers are entering other areas or using shared equipment or furniture; once clean, surfaces should be disinfected regularly. The disinfectant used should be one for which the manufacturer claims antiviral activity, meaning it can kill the virus (such as chlorine-based disinfectants). At least 10 minutes contact time is required to kill viruses.

Cleaning of facilities, such as tabletops and meal areas should occur after meal and break times. Areas where there is lots of pedestrian traffic or places where members of the public attend should be cleaned more regularly.

For many hard surfaces such as tool handles, the use of alcohol-based wipes before and after use will decrease the chances of contamination.

Alcohol-based hand sanitizer stations should be available throughout the site and workers should be given time and access to handwashing facilities. This encourages good hand hygiene.



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Hand hygiene

Soap and water are the most effective method of removing the virus from our hands. The soap breaks the outer layer of the virus. Wash for 20 seconds. Alcohol-based hand sanitizer can be used at other times (e.g. when hands have been contaminated from contact with surfaces). Cleaning hands also helps to reduce environmental contamination.

Personal protective equipment

Depending upon the work this may include eye protection, respiratory protection, clothing, gloves etc. Protective equipment must be cleaned between uses and must not be shared. If it is to be reused proper cleaning is essential.

Remember: cleaning is one of the control measures that must be used but it must be accompanied by measures that implement physical distancing and improved hygiene.