

# Cleaning and Disinfection Tips

## The Importance of Drying

Whatever disinfectant and method is used, one key decontamination step—the importance of which is often underestimated—is drying the environment. Most pathogens prefer a moist environment, and if they happen to have slipped past your chemical disinfectant and mechanical removal, they will happily persist for hours or days in a damp corner. Fatal bacterial pathogens have been cultured from pools of water lingering in kennels that had been completely cleaned and disinfected, and even from the disinfectant dispensing system itself. Attention to drying is especially important when the surface to be cleaned is uneven (leaving pools of water even after use of a squeegee) or in humid climates where air drying may not occur.

## Hand Sanitation

### GLOVES:

Gloves are the most fool-proof choice for preventing germ transfer on hands if they are used correctly. Although gloves can be a nuisance, time consuming, and relatively costly, there are times when it's clearly worth the effort (poopy puppies, anyone?). Utilizing gloves is extremely important when handling animals that may be infected with a zoonotic (transferrable to other species) illness like ringworm. Always wash hands after removing gloves, especially if you've been handling an animal with a serious or zoonotic illness, as hands can become contaminated through small breaks in the gloves or in the process of taking them off.

### HAND WASHING:

It was widely believed that hand washing was the next best choice when gloves are impractical. However, current research suggests that hand sanitizers are preferable in many circumstances because while proper hand washing has the significant advantage of removing even the most resistant pathogens, it's surprisingly hard to wash hands correctly. Ineffective hand washing may actually be less helpful than correct use of a good hand sanitizer. According to the Center for Disease Control, proper hand washing technique consists of the following:

1. Wet hands with warm running water
2. Lather with soap
3. Scrub all surfaces for a minimum of 20 seconds
4. Rinse
5. Thoroughly dry hands using two single use paper towels for 10 seconds each—if cloth towels are used, a fresh one must be used for each hand washing episode. Hands should be dried for 10 seconds on one area, then 10 seconds on a fresh area of the towel.

**As with environmental decontamination, the drying step is especially important.** Moisture on hands may actually facilitate pathogen survival and transfer.

### HAND SANITIZER:

The third strategy for dealing with contaminated hands is the use of hand sanitizer gels. Always use hand sanitizers according to directions, which usually involves rubbing for at least ten seconds, then allowing hands to air dry. Remember, no hand sanitizer is effective against the most durable pathogens such as Parvo, Panleuk, or ringworm. When these pathogens are suspected, utilize both gloves and hand washing.

## **Clothing and Disease Transmission**

The risk of disease transmission on clothing is enhanced when dealing with animals because they shed hair that is potentially coated with everything from the animal's saliva to whatever is in the environment. Some pathogens even cluster around hair follicles.

One of the most important and reasonably easy infectious disease control procedures is to change clothing or wear protective garments for "dirty" activities such as cleaning and treatment of sick animals. Although it is obviously not practical to fully change outfits with every interaction, spare scrub tops or protective smocks should be used whenever interacting with a potentially infectious or high risk animal. Discarded surgery gowns are ideal for this purpose, as the long sleeves provide full covering for arms which can otherwise escape both hand-washing and gloves.

## **Laundry**

A regular or commercial washing machine with hot water and bleach, followed by drying on a heat cycle will properly disinfect clothing and bedding. No more bleach than the usual amount for a given size of washing machine is needed (half a cup for an average household washer). Fully drying on a heat cycle is required for disinfection. Don't overload washers and dryers and make sure that clothing and hands don't become contaminated by dirty laundry and then transmit germs to freshly laundered articles.

## **Frequency**

Clean litter boxes, food/water bowls, and hard surfaces daily and fully disinfect weekly (see below for differences between "cleaning" and "disinfecting"). Change out and launder bedding weekly with a bleach solution, or more frequently if soiled or if foster animals are sick. For puppies and dogs, poop scoop your yard diligently. Routinely wash your hands after holding your foster animals and if you have more than one litter, wear a smock or change your clothes in between interactions. Don't forget to scrub down and disinfect floors, counters, and walls in between foster animals!

### **CLEANING:**

1. Remove organic material by wiping down with warm soapy water
2. Towel dry and let air dry completely before replacing bedding and reintroducing the animals

### **DISINFECTION:**

3. Spray or wipe down cleaned surfaces with freshly-made one part bleach to 1/32 parts cold water (4 oz. per gallon)
4. Let sit for 10 minutes! This is important when fully disinfecting
5. Make sure everything is COMPLETELY DRY before replacing bedding or bringing home a new foster animal