
A Strong and Healthy Start: Safety and Health Guidance for Vermont Schools FAQ 6: Cleaning and Sanitation

The Vermont Agency of Education (AOE) has released joint guidance with the Vermont Department of Health on safely reopening schools. This document, [A Strong and Healthy Start: Safety and Health Guidance for Vermont Schools](#), provides health guidance to school administrators and school personnel as they plan and implement the reopening of schools for the 2020-21 School Year in the context of COVID-19.

This Frequently Asked Questions document responds to follow up questions from educators and administrators and is intended to clarify and expand on the guidance

Q1. Regarding the "foggers" that are being used: Have there been any studies on the chemicals being used and long-term health impacts?

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) maintains [a list of products that meet their criteria for use against SARS-CoV-2](#), the virus that causes COVID-19. The EPA also has detailed guidance on [disinfecting public places, including schools](#). For a safety overview, see [6 Steps for Safe and Effective Disinfectant Use](#).

Most common EPA-registered household disinfectants – products that contain ethanol, isopropanol (isopropyl alcohol, hydrogen peroxide, L-lactic acid or citric acid are preferred because they are safer for health and the environment.

Q2. What is the consensus on how long the virus survives on surfaces in terms of keeping items clean in a classroom, like materials and books?

Current evidence suggests that the COVID-19 virus may live for hours to days on surfaces made from a variety of materials. It may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or an object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or eyes. However, this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads. For information about cleaning different types of surfaces, see [Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility](#) from CDC.

Q3. Should teachers take special precautions when bringing home items from school?

Paper-based materials such as mail, envelopes or completed paper assignments are not considered high risk for transmission and do not need additional cleaning or disinfection procedures. Frequently touched objects should be cleaned and disinfected at the end of each day per the cleaning and disinfection Health and Safety guidance, meaning they will be disinfected right before a teacher would take them home.

Cloth masks should be [washed after each use](#). It is important to always [remove your mask correctly](#) and wash your hands after handling or touching a used mask.

Q4. Under what conditions can air conditioning or fans be used?

The Health and Safety guidance suggests that windows should be opened frequently when air conditioning is not in use and details the specific use of box fans to enhance natural ventilation by blowing fresh outdoor in to the classroom via one window and indoor air out of the classroom via another window. It notes that the use of fans in a closed room would simply recirculate the same indoor air without any benefit in reducing airborne virus. This also applies to most window air conditioning units.

The Health and Safety guidance also includes detailed instructions on suggested modifications to building HVAC systems to improve outdoor air ventilation and improve HVAC filtration. Air conditioning can be used according to this guidance at the discretion of the superintendent or independent school head, or a designated staff member, such as a facilities manager.

Q5. What protocol should we follow for cleaning books between students' usage? The guidelines say they cannot share books and other materials, but they also say sharing books is a low-transmission risk and that libraries can be open. What about sharing books within the classroom, too?

The Health and Safety guidance suggests that schools limit the sharing of materials, assuring adequate supplies to minimize sharing of high touch materials like art supplies, lab equipment, computer equipment, etc. assigned to a single student. The guidance further states that electronic devices, toys, books, musical instruments, games or learning aids should not be shared.

The guidance on library books is that they may be safely returned to circulation three days after previous use. Teachers may choose to apply this principle to their classroom library, waiting three days after a student uses a book before making it available to other students in the class.

Q6. Can students sit on the floor in different places in the room without having to clean it?

Yes. As long as students who are able to wear masks are wearing masks and maintain appropriate distance (3-6 feet PreK-5; 6 feet for older students) they can sit in different places in the room throughout the day without having to clean the floor.

Q7. How will using chemical cleaners more than 3x daily affect air quality in rooms with no fresh air intake or exhaust?

Facilities managers and custodial staff must take sufficient ventilation into account when determining appropriate cleaning products and protocols. The Health and Safety Guidance

states that products certified as environmentally preferable by an independent third party (e.g. EPA's Safer Choice, Green Seal or ECOLOGO) may be used for cleaning, as well as environmentally preferable cleaning products under state contracts with the Department of Buildings & General Services.

Q9. Hand hygiene guidance will only work IF we are assured of enough supplies. Also, many of us are not around sinks all day: before & after cleaning, between classes, etc. How will districts install the additional handwashing stations that will be needed?

The Health and Safety guidance states that districts should ensure adequate supply of the following:

- Soap
- Hand sanitizer (at least 60% alcohol)
- Paper towels
- Tissues
- Cleaning and disinfection supplies
- Cloth face coverings (as feasible)
- No-touch/foot pedal trash cans
- No-touch soap/hand sanitizer dispensers
- Disposable food service items

The Agency of Education and Department of Building and General Services have assisted districts in connecting them with vendors for these supplies and will be on hand if schools are unable to ensure adequate supply of these materials.

Plans to meet the requirements handwashing and cleaning/disinfection will be built in to each school and/or district reopening plan and will be unique to each physical plant and student body.

Q10. In the guidance document, there seems to be an inconsistency with cleaning and hand hygiene. The cleaning says the alcohol content should be 70%, while hand sanitizer should be 60%. Why would the guidance be different for the two levels of alcohol?

Those alcohol content percentages come from CDC guidance (See: [CDC/EPA Cleaning & Disinfecting Guidance](#) and [Coronavirus Disease 2019: How to Protect Yourself and Others](#)). Cleaning supplies can have more alcohol since they don't come directly in contact with skin.