

ON COVID-19

Can the virus live on our uniforms?

This is a common question and one of some debate since clothing can be made of many different materials and weaves. In general, viruses can live for hours or days on some surfaces, assuming it has a stable environment. Movement, friction and temperature changes can all potentially shorten the lifespan of a virus outside a human host.

To avoid contamination on clothing, health care workers should be using disposable gowns to cover their regular clothing when in contact with individuals with suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19.

The virus is spread through respiratory droplets when an infected person sneezes or coughs. The droplets can also be spread through certain aerosol-generating medical procedures, but those would be outside the scope of practice for most home support workers.

To ensure clothing does not become infected, it's important that we screen clients to determine if they (or anyone in the area) have symptoms, *such as a fever or a new or worsening cough*. If these risk factors or any others are present, use a gown.

Can the virus live on the soles of our shoes?

A recent study from the *New England Journal of Medicine* looked at how long the virus could live on various surfaces. It found that the virus could live for up to three days on plastics like water bottles. Given that shoes are created from various rubbers, plastics and other materials, and many are more porous than a plastic bottle, it's reasonable to look at three days as a maximum for a surface such as a sneaker.

However, the life span of the virus is reduced by temperature changes, which would be likely to occur on a shoe people wear outside of home. While the virus living on the surface of a shoe is possible, it is not a likely

source of transmission for several reasons. First, the virus is spread by respiratory droplets which would need to find their way from an infected person to a shoe. From there it would need a stable environment in order to survive, which is unlikely on a shoe as forces such as gravity will continue working on the droplets, eventually bringing them to rest on the ground.

Most importantly, for the respiratory droplet to infect another person it would need to find its way from the shoe to a person's mucus membrane, which is highly unlikely (often through the mouth, but a virus can enter through the eyes and nose as well).

What types of precautions can we take if we don't have Personal Protective Equipment?

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) must be used anytime we are coming into contact with an individual that is a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19. That PPE would include a mask, gown, gloves and eye protection (face shield or goggles).

There is no substitute for PPE and any members being asked to work without appropriate PPE are reminded that they have a right to refuse unsafe work. More on that here: cupe.ca/refusing-unsafe-work-its-your-right.

Are Home Support workers at greater risk of getting the virus because of going home to home?

The risk of contracting any infectious disease is increased in proportion to the number of people you come into contact with, so a home support worker may have more contacts than a person who is working from home but far less than someone working at

the local grocery store. While all of society is working towards minimizing our contact with one another, one factor we control is our hand hygiene and use of PPE where needed.

What can we do if clients live with family? Can we asked them to go to another room?

Check with your employer for policies regarding the presence of family in your work area. To reduce the risk of exposure to an infected person, it's important that the active screening

questions are applied to anyone who will be in the home at the time the home support worker is present.

Can we leave if we are uncertain that the client is telling the truth?

Workers in Nova Scotia have the right to refuse unsafe work if they have reasonable cause to believe the work they have been assigned is likely to endanger their health and

safety. More on that here: cupe.ca/refusing-unsafe-work-its-your-right.

When can we use the Right to Refuse?

You have the right to refuse unsafe work if you have reasonable cause to believe the work could endanger your health and safety. A work refus-

al, for example, might be related to PPE either not being available when needed, or being provided with PPE that you have not been trained on.

Should we be using different vehicles for work or stick with one?

How many vehicles you use is not likely to affect your likelihood of contracting a virus. Handwashing is the best defense against the spread of the virus. It's likely that a person could touch various surfaces in their vehicle before washing their hands,

creating the potential for infected respiratory droplets to be transferred to the interior of the car. This risk can be greatly reduced by washing your hands (with soap and water or hand sanitizer) before touching any surfaces.

Should we be cleaning steering wheels daily?

To reduce the chance of infection we should all be washing any surfaces

in our homes and vehicles that are touched on a regular basis.

How often should I wipe off my car door handle?

Any surface you have touched after coming into contact with any surface that you didn't clean yourself should be considered contaminated and cleaned as soon as possible. The outside door handle will be less

susceptible to carrying the virus due to temperature and humidity differences; however, for an abundance of caution, it is recommended that you wipe it off anytime you touch it with hands that have not been washed.

We prepare meals for clients. Can groceries be contaminated?

Any surface that contains respiratory droplets from an infected person can be a potential source of infection. It is generally accepted that food itself is not a vector for transmission during this pandemic, but it's not impossible for packaging to be contaminated if a sick person has coughed or sneezed on it.

To prevent the risk of infection from any surface it is highly advisable to not touch your face until you have washed your hands after touching any item or surface that you have not cleaned yourself. Good advice is to pretend everything you touch is raw chicken and wash your hands appropriately.

Would a mixture of bleach and water in a spray bottle be sufficient to clean the bottom of shoes?

Yes, bleach is an effective disinfectant when used in the proper concentrations. The CDC in the US has a good resource for identifying the best cleaning products and concentrations to use on various surfaces:

www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cleaning-disinfection.html.

What can we use for cleaning items such as phones and steering wheels if Lysol wipes are not available?

The CDC resources on cleaning and disinfecting has good guidance on practices for cleaning and disinfecting various surfaces: cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cleaning-disinfection.html.

Can we get the virus from or pass the virus to pets?

There is no evidence to suggest that pets can be infected with or be carriers for the virus. This is a pervasive myth on social media but has no scientific basis.

Does the virus live on your hair?

No studies so far have looked specifically at the ability of the novel coronavirus to live on human hair but based on available information, it's not a likely source of transmission. Viruses tend to live longer on non-porous surfaces (like stainless steel), whereas most human hairs are

quite porous and as part of a living organism, have some degree of anti-microbial properties. That being said, there is so much variety in human hair it would be a sensible precaution to wash your hair if you feel there was any chance it was exposed to someone's respiratory droplets.

Should we shower every day after work?

If PPE is utilized when in the vicinity of suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19 and the worker is properly trained in donning and doffing procedures, then no. That being said, no precaution is perfect, and all plans are subject to human error, so if

available, a shower after work would offer an extra degree of certainty that you are not unknowingly carrying respiratory droplets somewhere on your body.