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The CDC said the risk of getting COVID-19 from surfaces is 'low,' suggesting deep-clean protocols are overkill

Marianne Guenot Apr 6, 2021, 7:04 AM



A store display in New York City on August 13. Noam Galai/Getty Images

Routine disinfection is unnecessary against the coronavirus in most situations, the CDC said Monday.

Studies have estimated the chance of catching COVID-19 from a surface at 1 in 10,000.

One public-health expert called deep cleaning a "bad use" of time and energy.

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Routine use of disinfectants to fight the coronavirus is mostly unnecessary, as the risk of transmission through touching surfaces is "low," the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said on Monday.

[In a science brief](#) based on analysis of the latest available data, the agency said intense cleaning was needed in only a few scenarios.

This news could bring an end to what some refer to as "[hygiene theater](#)," or routine deep cleaning of hotel rooms, business premises, and public transport. Such measures might appear reassuring but are

costly and, it seems, of limited use.

The brief said the risk of catching COVID-19 from surfaces was "generally considered to be very low," as some studies suggested that contact with a contaminated surface had less than a 1-in-10,000 chance of leading to infection.

In most settings, normal cleaning using soap or detergent is enough to reduce risk of transmission, the research brief said.

The CDC did identify one appropriate situation for deep cleaning: an indoor environment where a case of COVID-19 had been confirmed within the past 24 hours.

It has been known for months that contamination is much more likely to happen through exposure to the virus in the air, via other people, rather than through surfaces.

Last May the CDC clarified its position by saying "surface

transmission isn't thought to be the main way the virus spreads," but it still recommended that "frequently touched surfaces" be disinfected.

The new position recommends less deep cleaning.

In [an editorial published February 2](#), the academic journal Nature called for the CDC to update its guidance in this way.

It argued that resources and investment could be better used to emphasize the importance of wearing masks and to [improve ventilation](#).

COVID-19 disinfection protocols have come at a high cost. Last year, the New York Metropolitan Transit Authority spent \$484 million on sanitization, and it estimates that \$380 million will go into coronavirus-related sanitization every year until 2023, [Nature reported](#).

"If we took half the effort that's being given to disinfection, and we put it on ventilation, that will be huge," Jose-Luis Jimenez, an atmospheric chemist at the University of Colorado, [told Nature](#).

The change in position from the CDC was welcomed by one public-health expert. "Good to have the CDC leading the way again," David Fisman, a professor at the University of Toronto's Dalla Lana School of Public Health, said in a tweet Monday.

"Time to rethink the deep cleaning...it's a bad use of time, energy, and resources," he wrote.

The coronavirus pandemic

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David Fisman 
@DFisman 

So good to have the CDC leading the way again. Fomites and surfaces can theoretically transmit COVID-19 but risk is very low. Wash hands but time to rethink the deep cleaning...it's a bad use of time, energy and resources.

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)
CDC provides credible COVID-19 health information to the U.S.
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