

VRHP Recommendations for COVID 19-Era Operations Programs

Cleaning a vacation rental is no small task, even when we are not faced with a global pandemic. A housekeeper is expected to take a property that is in disarray from departing guests and completely reset it—eradicating the microbes that have been left behind in the property and creating a like-new experience for arriving guests. Vacation rental professionals understand that cleaning a property effectively requires specific training, appropriate supplies, and a systematic process.

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Vacation Rental Housekeeping Professionals (VRHP) is recommending that existing cleaning programs be augmented to include even more rigorous sanitization and disinfection protocols. These recommendations are below.

All vacation rental field staff/housekeepers/technicians or other employees should complete training regarding proper and safe cleaning techniques, property security, and the OSHA Hazard Communication program. Teams need to understand how to safely use chemical products (such as germicides used to clean bathrooms) and dispose of trash, cleaning supplies, and biohazards appropriately. **Tip: VRHP offers these types of training programs and can assist with questions from members about their programs.**

Disclaimer: These are merely guidelines, based on the currently available information regarding the novel coronavirus. This document is not intended as legal or medical advice. The recommendations here are subject to change as more information and education becomes available. VRHP always defers to local health and municipal authorities and it is up to each business owner to decide what their best business practices should be. VRHP strongly advocates the proper use of personal protective equipment (PPE), cleaning products, chemicals, and equipment.

COVID-19, Disinfection, and Sanitization

- Small viral particles can hang in the air for many hours. The [currently available WHO information](#) suggests that respiratory droplets can last up to 3 hours in the air. Respiratory droplets are heavier than smaller aerosol particles, which can linger in the air for a longer time. To date, the scientific research is still unclear as to how long smaller COVID-19 particles may stay suspended in air, and what possible infection rates may stem from aerosols. A study published in The [New England Journal of Medicine](#) found that the COVID-19 virus can survive up to three days on hard metal surfaces and plastic and up to 24 hours on cardboard. During that window of the time, the virus does begin to weaken. In light of these findings, VRHP recommends that waiting for the majority of airborne droplets to settle (at least 3 hours) is the safest course of action. A timeframe of up to 24 hours between the last exit from a property and next entry is reasonable, if the business needs can accommodate longer wait times.
- VRHP strongly emphasizes the importance of ensuring the appropriate use of all personal protective equipment (PPE), including masks, disposable gloves, and in some cases splash goggles for any entry into a property, even after the 24-hour waiting period. Splash goggles to cover the eyes and a mask that covers the nose and mouth and creates a good seal against the face should be required for any entry to a property within the 3-hour timeframe for respiratory droplet settling.
- Cleaning is defined by the CDC as “the removal of germs, dirt, and impurities from surfaces. It does not kill germs, but by removing them, it lowers their numbers and the risk of spreading infection.”
- Disinfection is a separate step that should come *after* cleaning. If surfaces are dirty, they should be cleaned prior to disinfection.
- Disinfection vs Sanitization: These two activities are not the same. Sanitizing refers to reducing the number of germs to a safe level by cleaning. Disinfecting refers to killing nearly 100% of germs on surfaces or objects, according to the CDC. It is important to note that when a surface has been disinfected, if there are virus particles in the air, those particles may settle on the newly cleaned surface. This means that the surface is now in a sanitized state, not a disinfected state. This concept holds true, regardless of whether we are talking about the COVID-19 virus or other viruses, bacteria, dust, or other particles. For this reason, VRHP recommends being careful with advertising that properties are truly “100% disinfected” and suggests language instead that says

that your company is using disinfecting products and/or that properties have been through a disinfection process.

- Properly dispose of gloves and use hand sanitizer when finished and BEFORE entering your vehicle and especially before touching the steering wheel.
- All field staff should continue proper hand washing protocols throughout the day and should avoid touching eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands. The CDC handwashing guidance is at: <https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/when-how-handwashing.html>.

Proper PPE Usage

- All staff (housekeepers, inspectors, maintenance technicians, or anyone else) should wear masks and disposable gloves. It is imperative that all staff are trained in correct mask and glove usage. (<https://vimeo.com/400609879> and <https://vimeo.com/400609879>)
- Gloves should be changed between properties and also between certain in-property tasks. Hands should be washed as soon as possible after gloves are removed.
- Always wash hands thoroughly, for at least 20 seconds, throughout the day but especially when gloves are removed. According to the CDC, “If soap and water are not available and hands are not visibly dirty, an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol may be used. However, if hands are visibly dirty, always wash hands with soap and water.”
- Once a mask is moist or wet it is no longer effective and should not be used any more. For a disposable mask, discard it appropriately. For a cloth mask that can be reused or washed, carefully place it in a zip lock bag to be disinfected later.
- Splash goggles provide the best protection against air movement across the eyes. Splash goggles are different from regular safety glasses in that they provide a seal that protects your eyes from the air and/or liquid.

Products, Cleaning Agents, and Equipment

- The EPA offers a list of products with “Emerging Viral Pathogens AND Human Coronavirus claims for use against SARS-CoV-2.” <https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2>
- VRHP strongly recommends that you check your existing products against this list and also work with your preferred janitorial product supplier(s) to obtain additional products as needed.
- All disinfecting products require dwell time. Dwell time is the amount of time needed for a product “sit” on the surface and kill the viruses and microbes.
- Use disinfecting products on all major surfaces and pay attention to all high touch areas, including door knobs (inside and out), lockboxes or electronics lock panels, elevator buttons, stair railings, telephones, light switches, remote controls, arms of chairs, refrigerator door handles, sliding door handles, toilets, faucets and knobs, clothes hangers, touch screens, and play sets/toys, to name a few.

Cleaning and Inspections

- Extra cleaning time should be allocated to existing turnover timeframes. How much time is a business decision for each company. The two major factors in how much time is needed are:
 - The amount of time required to sanitize/disinfect high-touch areas that may not have previously been rigorously cleaned on every turn
 - Allowing a certain amount of time for the nebulized virus particles to settle out of the air.
- As per the most recent guidance, it can take up to 3 hours for larger COVID-19 particles to fully settle to the ground. Waiting longer is likely the safest course of action and 24 hours between the last exit and next entry is reasonable.
 - If the business need requires entry to a property sooner (e.g., in the case of a same-day turn), VRHP strongly advises that that staff strictly and judiciously follow all PPE best practices (wearing mask, gloves,

and/or other protective gear such as splash goggles) and follow all cleaning and disinfecting best practices to ensure safety.

- As part of the guest departure duties, if guests can be asked to turn on all ceiling fans and/or HVAC fans, that would be ideal. When the cleaner or inspector arrives, they can open a few windows to air property out if fan use is not possible. Make sure windows are closed when staff leave the property.
- If a large property requires more than one cleaner or other staff member to be present, staff must ensure that proper social distancing protocols are followed (by remaining at least 6' apart at all times and wearing masks and gloves).
- As per the guidelines above, a guest would ideally check into a property 18- 24 hours after the property has been inspected (post-cleaning). Remote check-ins, where guests go directly to their properties and not into a Vacation Rental office, is preferable. Each business will have to plan for what can reasonably be accomplished.
- Note that these additional cleaning and wait times may make it impossible to allow early check-ins or late check-outs. How to handle those requests is an individual business decision.

Soft Surfaces and Upholstery

- To date, there is limited information regarding how long the COVID-19 virus can live on fabric or other soft surfaces.
- Most soft surfaces (such as upholstery) can only be sanitized.
- Using a pressurized pump sprayer to distribute a sanitizing product across all soft surfaces is best. Be sure to know the limitations of your product and that it is safe to use on the soft goods in the property.

Linens and Bedding

- Linens and bedding should not be shaken, so as not to disperse viral particulates into the air.
- There are multiple ways that dirty linen can be removed from the property and placed in a vehicle. A few ways that VRHP recommends are:
 - Dirty linens can be placed into a dissolvable laundry bag. The dissolvable bag can then be tied closed and placed inside your regular linen bag or large plastic trash or contractor bag. Once at the laundry, the dissolvable bag can be removed from the regular plastic bag and placed directly in the washing machine. The regular trash bag can be recycled.
 - Linens could be placed in a plastic trash or contractor bag, and then that bag can then be tied closed and placed inside your regular linen bag.
 - Linens could be placed in your regular linen bag, closed, and then encased in a plastic trash or contractor bag.
 - A disinfecting product that is approved for soft surfaces and fabrics may be applied to bagged dirty linens, if desired.
- The housekeeper should remove gloves (safely, as per guidelines) after removing the dirty linen and securing them in bags. Hand sanitizer should be applied and fresh gloves put on before putting the clean linen on the bed.
- Ensure that all pillows have pillow protectors on them and the mattress has a mattress pad covering it. These items could be changed as often as needed or as seems reasonable.
- There are different ways to handle blankets, comforters or other top-layer bedding.
 - Blankets/comforters should ideally be removed for laundering and replaced with a freshly washed item.
 - Blankets/comforters could also be triple sheeted with freshly laundered sheets.
 - Blankets/comforters could also be covered with a freshly washed duvet cover as an alternative.
- Linens and bedding should be professionally laundered, at the correct temperatures and with the correct chemical chemistry for proper cleaning and sanitization. If you only have the option to launder in the property, extra time will be required as a longer dry time at the highest setting the linen will allow is required. Be aware, fabrics that require a low temperature are not going to be sanitized.

Trash Removal

- For both In-property trash gathering or outside trash in container collection and removal:
 - Gloves and masks should be worn at all times.
 - When picking up trash one should always be aware of sharps and jagged pieces of glass or metal that could cut the individual as they are carrying the bag.
 - One should never use their hand to push “compact” the trash bags in the trash bin so more bags can be added. This should always be done with an engineering device such as a stick, shovel, rake, etc.
 - Use a disinfecting product on the trash barrel or bin and place a fresh liner or bag inside.

Maintenance

- Triage your maintenance requests. VRHP recommends letting guests know that some smaller requests that can wait until guest departure may not be able to be honored. Whether or not to compensate the guest for not addressing an issue is a business decision for your company.
- The safest policy is to only dispatch a maintenance technician or third-party vendor if the issue is truly something that needs to be handled immediately, while the guest is still in residence. Non-essential visits should be severely limited or restricted.
- VRHP strongly recommends that all guests should vacate property for the maintenance tech to enter. Entry when guests are present should be discouraged.
- Technicians should wear gloves and masks at all times, disposing of those properly after exiting. In addition, VRHP strongly recommends that anyone entering a property less than 18 hours after guests have vacated the premises should wear splash goggles.

Owner and Guest Policies

- In light of the stringent cleaning protocols, VRHP does not recommend that owners or guests be allowed to clean with no follow up work from your company.
 - If an owner or guest offers to clean, and you wish to allow this, VRHP recommends that you implement a “Professional Disinfection Cleaning” that does a once-over with disinfecting products after the owner or guest has done their version of cleaning. How much to charge for that is a business decision for your company.
- VRHP recommends that all extra throw blankets, decorative pillows or other soft objects should be boxed or bagged up and put away until further notice.
- Additional pillow protectors, pillows, mattress pads/protectors, blankets, comforters (or duvet covers) should be purchased, as possible, so they can be easily changed and laundered.

Telling Your Story

- Consider placing a “This property has been properly cleaned and sanitized for your arrival” door hanger on the front door or put other signage in the property.
- Create a page on your website or blog that outlines what you are doing to clean, sanitize, and disinfect and keep guests safe.
- Send out an email to your database of guests informing them of all you are doing to clean, sanitize, and disinfect to ensure that properties are safe.
- Consider adding a sentence to each property listing description stating that your properties are clean and safe for arrival and ready for the guests’ vacation.