

 	Environmental Cleaning Standard Operating Procedure
Title: Introduction	
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Applies to: Health workers undertaking cleaning tasks	Exclusions:
Purpose: This module outlines the purpose and set up of the eight modules that, together, make up the Cleaning of the Healthcare Environment Standard Operating Procedure. It includes a list of key definitions.	
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Introduction

NSW Health is committed to the implementation of environmental cleaning programs across NSW Health organisations to reduce the risk of healthcare associated infections.

Effective environmental cleaning is an essential component of any effective infection prevention and control program aimed at providing safe, high-quality healthcare for patients and a safe working environment for health workers in healthcare settings.

[Cleaning of the Healthcare Environment \(PD2023_018\)](#) requires all NSW Health organisations to have adequately resourced systems and processes in place to ensure that:

- routine cleaning of the healthcare environment meets required minimum standards
- staff undertaking cleaning are trained in all aspects relevant to cleaning in healthcare environments
- scheduling and frequency of environmental cleaning is based on assessment of risk to patients, visitors and staff
- the effectiveness of the environmental cleaning program undergoes regular cleaning audits
- if required, appropriate action is taken to improve cleaning performance.

See also actions [3.13](#) and [3.14](#) of the Prevention and Controlling Infections Standard of the [National Safety and Quality Health Service \(NSQHS\) Standards](#).

The Environmental Cleaning Standard Operating Procedure is set out in eight modules that cover the issues required to implement and maintain an environmental cleaning program within a healthcare facility. These modules are:

- Module 1: Frequency of cleaning
- Module 2: Personal protective equipment
- Module 3: Work procedures for cleaning
- Module 4: Specialised patient conditions
- Module 5: Cleaning equipment
- Module 6: Cleaning agents
- Module 7: Evaluation of cleaning
- Module 8: Supporting documents.

This Environmental Cleaning Standard Operating Procedure provides evidence-based guidance and recommendations for undertaking environmental cleaning in healthcare facilities. NSW public healthcare facilities should endeavour to comply with the guidance and recommendations in this procedure.

All staff are responsible for the cleanliness of healthcare facilities.

The Environmental Cleaning Standard Operating Procedure provides evidence-based guidance and recommendations for cleaning in healthcare facilities.

NSW public healthcare facilities should strive to comply with the guidance in this procedure.

The allocation of resources for cleaning and the frequency of cleaning will vary per facility and should be locally determined based on need.

Cleaning procedures for specific settings and activities are set out in module 3.

Time set out for various cleaning procedures or tasks in modules 3 and 4 are approximate only. Actual cleaning times for specific tasks will depend on local circumstances; for example, space and size of room and staffing allocated.

It is essential that cleaning equipment is fit-for-purpose, easy-to-use, well-maintained and regularly reviewed.

All staff who are cleaning must be trained in work health and safety, infection prevention and control principles and the correct use of personal protective equipment. Training, education and instructions about how to perform work safely and effectively should be completed prior to being allocated to specific cleaning tasks. Ongoing refresher training is essential to maintaining cleaning standards and safety to the health workers.

Prior to purchasing new equipment or refurbishing a facility, cleaning requirements should be considered in consultation with local cleaning supervisors and infection prevention and control staff.

Definition of terms

Alcohol-based hand rub (ABHR)	An alcohol-containing preparation (such as gel, foam or liquid) designed for reducing the number of viable microorganisms on dry, unsoiled hands. ¹
Australian Register of Therapeutic Goods (ARTG)	Public database of therapeutic goods that can be legally supplied in Australia. ²
Body substance	Any substance produced by, or otherwise expelled, excreted, or extracted from the body. Body substance is used rather than body fluid to emphasise the need for precautions to prevent contact with solid tissue and faeces as well as blood (including dried blood) and body fluids. This does not include intact skin, hair and sweat. ¹
Cleaning	The removal of visible soil (such as inorganic and organic material) from objects and surfaces and is normally accomplished manually or mechanically using water with detergents or enzymatic products. ³
Clinical waste	Clinical waste with the potential to cause injury, infection or offence, such as: • unrecognisable human tissue (excluding hair, teeth, nails and anatomical waste) • bulk blood or other body fluids (or body substances) • material and equipment visibly stained by blood or body fluids (includes incontinence pads and disposable nappies that come from an infectious patient) • lab specimens, cultures or other waste from lab investigations • waste from medical or veterinary research • genetically modified organisms (GMOs).⁴
Debris	Includes litter and rubbish, such as crisp packets, drink cans and bottles, chewing gum, cigarette butts, adhesive tape, grit and limescale. ⁵
Degreaser	Substance or product that removes or dissolves grease.
Detergent solution	A detergent product which is intended to be used in the cleaning of surfaces or other medical devices diluted with water as per manufacturer's instructions. ⁶
Dirt	Includes mud, smudges, soil, graffiti, mould, fingerprints, ingrained dirt, scum. ⁵
Discharge cleaning	Cleaning and disinfection process required after patient(s) has vacated the room, either through room transfer or discharge. ⁶

Disinfectant	A substance: a) that is recommended by its manufacturer for application to an inanimate object to kill micro-organisms and b) that is not represented by the manufacturer to be suitable for internal use. ⁶
Disinfection	A process that eliminates many or all pathogenic microorganisms, except bacterial spores, on inanimate objects. ¹
Dual purpose cleaner/disinfectant	A product that combines a detergent-cleaning effect by surfactants and also contains a biocide. The product must be listed on the ARTG. Dual purpose cleaner/disinfectants are designed to eliminate the need for separate cleaning and disinfection processes to be carried out consecutively by combining them into a single process. ³
Dust	Includes lint, powder, fluff and cobweb. ⁵
Environment	The physical surroundings in which health care is delivered, including the building, fixtures, fittings and services, such as air and water supply. Environment can also include other patients, consumers, visitors and the workforce. ⁶
Element	An item within a functional area, or any part of the fabric or fittings of a functional area, which requires cleaning. ⁵
Functional area	Any area in a healthcare facility that requires cleaning. The functional areas have been grouped under four risk categories: extreme, high, medium and low. These risk categories reflect the frequency and intensity of cleaning required to meet minimum cleaning standards. ³
Fluid resistant gown/apron	A single use, fluid-resistant gown, or apron, made of impervious material, provides a barrier to reduce opportunities for contact-transmission in healthcare settings. ⁷
Hand hygiene	A general term referring to the action of hand cleansing. Includes washing hands with the use of water, soap, or a soap solution, either non-antimicrobial or antimicrobial, or applying a waterless alcohol-based hand rub (ABHR) to the surface of the hands. When performed correctly, hand hygiene results in a reduction of microorganisms on hands. ¹
Healthcare associated infection	Refers to infections acquired in healthcare facilities and infections that occur as a direct or indirect result of healthcare interventions and which may manifest after people leave the healthcare facility. ¹
Healthcare facility	Any facility that delivers healthcare services. This includes hospitals, general practice clinics, dentistry practices, other community-based office practices, day surgery centres, emergency services, domiciliary nursing services, long-term care facilities, aged care facilities, Indigenous medical services,

	alternative health provider facilities and other community service facilities, such as needle exchanges. ⁶
Infection	The invasion of a host organism's bodily tissues by microorganisms and their subsequent multiplication, resulting in disease-causing symptoms and the reaction of host tissues to these organisms and the toxins they produce. ⁷
ICP	Infection prevention and control professional.
Isolation area	A room or area in which patients are isolated or cohorted, who are known or suspected of having a condition for which transmission-based precautions are required to prevent healthcare associated infections.
Microorganisms	Most infectious agents are microorganisms. These exist naturally everywhere in the environment and not all cause infection (such as "good" bacteria present in the body's normal flora). Parasites, prions and several classes of microorganism — including bacteria, viruses, fungi and protozoa — can be involved in either colonisation or infection, depending on the susceptibility of the host. ⁶
Multidrug-resistant organisms (MRO)	Microorganisms, predominantly bacteria, that are resistant to one or more classes of antimicrobial agents. ¹
NSW Health organisation	Refers to local health districts, statutory health corporations, affiliated health organisations and administrative units within the Health Administration Corporation, such as the NSW Ambulance Service, HealthShare NSW and the Ministry of Health.
Outbreak	The occurrence of disease exceeding the expected level for a given population within a specific timeframe. This includes single cases of some diseases not previously seen or those that have previously been eliminated. Typically, in healthcare this has been defined as two or more cases, which should trigger an outbreak management process. ¹
Patient care area	The room or area in which patient care takes place. ⁶
Patient surroundings	The space temporarily occupied by an individual patient and the items within it. This will vary between settings and will contain surfaces frequently touched by the: 1. patient occupying that space (for example, bed, bedside table, chair and personal belongings); and 2. staff member providing patient care (for example, monitors and knobs). Patient surroundings will vary with the patient setting, as indicated in the samples that follow.

	Hospital inpatient setting The patient surroundings will include items such as the patient's bed, bedside table, bed linen, monitors, other medical equipment and personal belongings kept at the patient's bedside. The patient observation charts (and healthcare record) are: • part of the patient surroundings if, for example, they are on the end of the patient's bed • not part of the patient surroundings if, for example, they are kept outside the door to the patient's room. Patient surroundings do not include curtains, partitions and doors between separate patient areas. Operating theatre The patient surroundings will include, for example, the top of the operating table, arm board, anaesthetic machine and trolleys. Office-based care (for example, clinics or hospital outpatient setting) The patient surroundings will usually include any procedural trolleys used and the examination table if the patient sits/lies on it. Patient's home The patient surroundings may include all items in the patient's home, including medical equipment.⁷
Personal protective equipment (PPE)	Refers to a variety of protective barriers used alone, or in combination, to protect mucous membranes, skin, and clothing from contact with recognised and unrecognised sources of infectious agents in healthcare settings. ¹
pH	A measure of the acidity or alkalinity of a solution, numerically equal to 7 for neutral solutions, increasing with increasing alkalinity and decreasing with increasing acidity, as follows: 0 = maximum acidity 3 = moderate acidity 7 = neutral 11 = moderate alkalinity 14 = maximum alkalinity.⁸
Risk	The chance of something happening that will have a negative impact. Risk is measured by the consequences of an event and its likelihood. ⁶
Risk assessment	The review of a patient or clinical situation to determine risk of adverse consequences. ⁷

Risk management	Actions implemented to minimise or control risk. ⁷
Routine	Performed as part of usual practice; as opposed to the use of additional measures in specific circumstances (for example, where invasive procedures are conducted or in the event of an outbreak). ⁶
Soil	Natural or artificial contamination on a device or surface following its use or simulated use. Soil can protect, harbour or assist the growth of microorganisms and includes organic matter, inorganic matter, blood tissue and other biological material. ⁹
Spillage	Includes any liquid, tea stains, sticky substances. ⁵
Staff	For the purpose of the Environmental Cleaning Standard Operating Procedure, staff refers to any person working in any capacity within NSW Health, including contractors, students and volunteers.
Standard precautions	Standard precautions represent the minimum infection prevention measures that apply to all patient care, regardless of suspected or confirmed infection status of the patient, in any setting where healthcare is delivered. These evidence-based practices are designed to both protect and prevent spread of infection among patients and health workers. ¹
Sterilisation	Validated process used to render a product free from viable microorganisms. ⁹
Terminal cleaning	Cleaning and disinfection process required after patient(s) with transmission-based precautions has vacated the room, either through room transfer or discharge.
Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA)	Australia's regulatory authority for therapeutic goods. ¹⁰
Transmission-based precautions	Additional work practices in situations where standard precautions alone may be insufficient to prevent transmission of infection, such as, contact, droplet and airborne precautions or a combination of these precautions. ¹

¹ [Infection Prevention and Control in Healthcare Settings \(PD2023_025\)](#)

² <https://www.tga.gov.au/products/australian-register-therapeutic-goods-artg>

³ [Cleaning of the Healthcare Environment \(PD2023_018\)](#)

⁴ [Clinical and Related Waste Management for Health Services \(PD2020_049\)](#)

⁵ [NHS National Standards for Healthcare Cleanliness 2021](#)

⁶ [Australian Guidelines for the Prevention and Control of Infection in Health Care](#)

⁷ [Infection Prevention and Control Practice Handbook](#)

⁸ <https://www.epa.gov/goldkingmine/what-ph>

⁹ AS 5369:2023 Reprocessing of reusable medical devices and other devices in health and non-health related facilities

¹⁰ <https://www.tga.gov.au/about-tga>