In brief
Fomite transmission and deep cleaning

Fomite transmission

- In February 2020, the World Health Organisation (WHO) noted fomites as a potential route of COVID-19 transmission. However, in July 2020, an update noted that despite consistent evidence of SARS-CoV-2 RNA on certain surfaces, there is no direct evidence of fomite transmission. Studies have reported consistent evidence of SARS-CoV-2 contamination of surfaces and the survival of the virus on certain surfaces; however, fomite transmission is unlikely. The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports the risk of infection through contact with contaminated surfaces to be low.

Deep cleaning

- Despite the low risk of fomite transmission, there continues to be significant investment in deep-cleaning and disinfection to reduce potential surface contamination. A Nature perspective in January 2021 questioned the value of this. A modelling study found transmission from surfaces was unlikely where shedding was reduced by mask wearing, even with infrequent surface cleaning. The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention advises if a COVID-19 positive person is known to have been in a space in the previous 24 hours, cleaning and disinfection is warranted. NSW Health has also provided specific cleaning guidance for areas where a confirmed or suspected COVID-19 case has been. There are recommendations for increased cleaning in public areas such as on NSW public transport. Cleaning and disinfection protocols are most appropriate when context-specific. Other infection control measures such as regular hand washing or use of alcohol-based hand sanitiser are considered crucial in minimising disease transmission, including infection from surfaces.

To inform this brief, PubMed and Google searches were conducted using terms related to cleaning, fomites, schools and COVID-19 on 1 April 2021 and 17 November 2021. The Critical Intelligence Unit maintains a living evidence table on COVID-19 transmission.

References


In brief documents are not an exhaustive list of publications but aim to provide an overview of what is already known about a specific topic. This brief has not been peer-reviewed and should not be a substitute for individual clinical judgement, nor is it an endorsed position of NSW Health.


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