COVID-19 Critical Intelligence Unit: Fomite transmission and deep cleaning

In brief

Fomite transmission and deep cleaning

3 December 2021

Fomite transmission

- In February 2020, the World Health Organisation (WHO) noted fomites as a potential route of COVID-19 transmission.\(^1\) 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.\(^2\)
- 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.\(^1-6\)
- The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports the risk of infection through contact with contaminated surfaces to be low.\(^7\)

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.\(^8\)
- A modelling study found transmission from surfaces was unlikely where shedding was reduced by mask wearing, even with infrequent surface cleaning.\(^9\)
- 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.\(^10, 11\)
- NSW Health has also provided specific cleaning guidance for areas where a confirmed or suspected COVID-19 case has been.\(^12\)
- There are recommendations for increased cleaning in public areas such as on NSW public transport.\(^13\) Cleaning and disinfection protocols are most appropriate when context-specific.\(^14\)
- 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.\(^10, 15\)

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

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Evidence checks are archived a year after the date of publication