

# VRHP Cleaning Guidelines for Professional Vacation Rental Managers

The vacation rental industry has always taken cleaning very seriously, but in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, the industry and the general public have kept hygiene and sanitization very much in focus. The Vacation Rental Housekeeping Professionals (VRHP) know that cleaning a vacation rental is no small task, even at the best of times. 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.

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.**

## Cleaning, Disinfection, and Sanitization – Defining Terms

- Cleaning, at its core, is the removal of germs, dirt, and impurities from surfaces using water, soap or other detergents. Cleaning does not kill germs, but it does reduce their presence, thereby lowering the risk of spreading infection.
- Disinfection is a separate step that should come *after* cleaning. Always clean surfaces before disinfecting.
- 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.

## Products and Cleaning Agents

- VRHP recommends working with a preferred janitorial product supplier to obtain cleaning products and equipment as needed. Developing a relationship with your supplier is beneficial in several ways. They have in-depth knowledge of the products and equipment that you might need and can advise or even provide training for your team. Commercial products are also often less expensive than products purchased from retail establishments.
- 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.
- The EPA maintains a list of disinfectants rated for Covid-19 and other pathogens at <https://cfpub.epa.gov/wizards/disinfectants/>.
- All operations staff (housekeepers, inspectors, maintenance technicians, or anyone else) should be trained on when it is appropriate to wear masks, disposable gloves, or other safety gear. All cleaning products and chemicals have a Safety Data Sheet that communicates hazard information, including any PPE required or recommended with use.

- Gloves and masks should be worn when cleaning in areas that have been contaminated by biological material such as feces or vomit.

## Cleaning Best Practices

- When cleaning and/or disinfecting, focus not just on major surfaces but also pay attention to high touch areas, such as door knobs, 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.
- 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.
- For both In-property trash gathering or outside trash in container collection and removal:
  - When picking up trash one should always be aware of “sharps” (such as needles) 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.
- Create clear company policies and procedures for cleaning and inspection and ensure they are documented.
  - Document the steps involved in cleaning and inspection and ensure your operations teams are trained in those procedures.
  - Create and document your Standard Home Appearance, so that your team members know what a guest-ready or owner-ready property should look like and can be held accountable to that standard.

## OSHA Compliance

Employers are responsible for providing a safe work environment for employees. Key employer responsibilities have been outlined by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). Becoming compliant with OSHA law means learning and adhering to all applicable regulations. These include (but are not limited to) keeping records of injuries, equipping workers with necessary hazard information, creating safety plans, and providing PPE as needed. Employers need to be aware of all local and state regulations that may be in addition to the federal OSHA regulations.

As professional vacation rental managers, we have a responsibility to keep our teams healthy and safe. Businesses that are found to be out of compliance may face hefty penalties. Some of the basic steps toward OSHA comppliance include:

- Creating and Communicating a Hazard Communication Plan (Including Safety Data Sheets)
- Creating and Communicating a Emergency Action Plan
- Creating and Communicating a Fire Safety Plan
- Have an Appropriate First Aid Kit and/or Medical Supplies
- Identifying and Marking Exit Routes
- Walking/Working Surfaces Protection
- Providing PPE (as needed)
- Filing Reports When Health and/or Safety are Impacted

- Display an OSHA Poster (Documenting Worker’s Rights) in the Workplace

More information on OSHA compliance can be found at:

<https://www.osha.gov/complianceassistance/quickstarts/general-industry>

## Outbreaks of Disease

While the COVID-19 pandemic affected all of us globally, there are also times when there are local outbreaks of other diseases. Some diseases that are commonly transmitted through surfaces include influenza, hand foot and mouth disease, norovirus, rotavirus, and even basic seasonal colds.

When such infections are determined to be prevalent, VRHP recommends that existing cleaning programs be augmented to include even more rigorous sanitization and disinfection protocols. These recommendations are below. In addition, we advise working with your local county or city health department to know, understand, and follow their guidance.

*Disclaimer: These are merely guidelines, based on the currently available information regarding infectious diseases. This document is not intended as legal or medical advice. 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.*

- 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, depending on which disease(s) may be present. Splash goggles that cover the eyes and a mask that covers the nose and mouth and creates a good seal against the face reduce the likelihood of accidental transmission.
- All field staff should continue proper hand washing protocols throughout the day and should avoid touching eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands. 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.” The full CDC handwashing guidance is at: <https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/when-how-handwashing.html>.
- Properly dispose of gloves and wash your hands or use hand sanitizer when finished and BEFORE entering your vehicle and especially before touching the steering wheel.
- 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.
- 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.
- When the cleaner or inspector arrives, VRHP recommends turning on all ceiling fans and/or HVAC fans and opening a few windows to air property out. Of course, make sure windows and doors are closed when staff leave the property.
- 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>

## **Tell Your Story, Share Your Brand**

- For professional vacation rental managers, the cleanliness and condition of your properties is part of your brand. There are a number of ways that you can communicate with guests and owners about this aspect of your business, to assure health and safety and instill trust.
  - Create a page on your website or blog that outlines your cleaning process.
  - 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 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.
  - 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.