

Questions and Answers Regarding Municipally Owned Public Washrooms

Is it advisable for municipalities to (re)open public washrooms at this time and/or to provide portable public toilets? Or, is it safer not to do so?

Public washroom facilities are an important public health measure in maintaining community sanitation. This decision is up to the municipality if they want to reopen public washrooms. Public Washrooms on municipal property are the responsibility of the municipality and are not regulated by public health regulations, except in circumstances where they are not maintained and may result in a health hazard. A properly cleaned washroom any time is recommended.

What PPE should staff or contractors wear when cleaning or disinfecting public washrooms?

No additional PPE is required for cleaning washrooms unless recommended by the manufacturer of the products you are using. COVID-19 is easily killed by low level disinfectants including bleach. Glove use is recommended as cleaning and sanitizing chemicals may be irritating to the skin. If gloves are used, regular disposable gloves are suitable, and hand hygiene must be performed when they are removed. These gloves are task specific and used gloves are considered contaminated and should not be worn to complete other jobs. Avoid touching of the face when wearing gloves. No other PPE is required.

Should staff discard certain PPE between cleaning and/or sanitizing each bathroom or can they reuse them each time they clean a washroom, and can they reuse them at multiple washrooms?

Most PPE is single use and disposable. Staff should always clean from clean to dirty to avoid re-contaminating surfaces. Once they have completed the cleaning stage they can then move to the sanitizing step. If there are multiple stalls in one washroom the gloves can be discarded after the entire washroom is cleaned and sanitized.

What other types of equipment should staff use when cleaning the washrooms such as (paper) towels, disposable wipes, etc.? What specifications are required, and should they be discarded between cleaning each washroom?

Many products are available on the market for cleaning and sanitizing. Some products are ready to use wipes which are effective but may be costly. These wipes must not be disposed of in the toilet as they can cause clogs. Some wipes may be used for cleaning and sanitizing but this is always two steps, cleaning first and then sanitizing with a new wipe to leave the surface wet. Reusable cloths are acceptable as long as they are laundered in hot soapy water and dried in a dryer. Paper towels may be used to apply cleaners and disinfectants and must be disposed of after each use.

How can staff prevent unsafe interactions with users of the washroom while they are cleaning them?

A sign should be placed on the door indicating that cleaning is taking place and that the washroom is temporarily closed. A pylon or caution sign can be placed at the entrance as well. Signage should be in place in a multiple stall washroom reminding people to physical distance and to wash their hands.

What extra precautions should they undertake if they find excrement, vomit or urine in a washroom, either in the toilet or sink or on the floor, walls or elsewhere?

Any excrement, vomit etc. should be treated as contaminated and may contain various pathogens. The area should be wet down, and wiped to remove gross contamination, and then cleaned and sanitized. Disposable cleaning products are preferable in this scenario. It is important to follow directions on the products you use to ensure proper concentrations.

Should staff lock themselves inside the washroom or portable toilet when undertaking cleaning to prevent users from entering?

No, this is not advisable. Signage or a barrier/marker outside of the washroom is preferable. If staff become locked in and need assistance, this may cause delays.

Should a sign or some type of barrier be placed outside the washroom when it is being cleaned that warns potential users to stay out and 2m away from the door so that staff can enter and exit safely without contact with the public while undertaking cleaning activities?

Yes this is a good practice.

Should they treat portable toilets differently from washrooms in buildings?

All frequently touched surfaces require the same attention whether in a building or a portable structure. Portable structures may tend to be more easily soiled because many people try to avoid sitting on the seat, so the seat and floor areas tend to be soiled easily. Special attention should be paid to the toilet seat, door handles and toilet paper dispenser in the portable setting.