

Interim Guidance for Individuals and Organisations involved with Sex Work during the COVID-19 Pandemic in the Caribbean

6 August 2020

This guidance document provides information for persons and organisations involved with sex work in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Caribbean. This information is based on currently available scientific evidence and expert opinion and is subject to change as new information becomes available. It should be read in conjunction with relevant national legislation, regulations, and policies. This document has been adapted for the Caribbean situation, and therefore may differ from guidance developed by other agencies.

Background

On 11 March 2020, the Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the outbreak of a novel coronavirus, COVID-19 as a pandemic. Most Caribbean countries have reported at least one confirmed case of COVID-19. CARPHA has assessed the risk of continued transmission in and to the Caribbean Region as Very High. While some CARPHA Member States (CMS) have succeeded in stopping transmission of the virus, some have reported sporadic cases, others have clusters, while only one CMS has reported community transmission. Within this context, several Member States have begun a phased lifting of in-country restrictions, initiated repatriation of nationals and some countries have opened their borders to travelers.

What is COVID-19?

The virus belongs in the same family of coronaviruses as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), 2002/03 outbreak (Reuters, CDC) and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS-CoV), 2012 outbreak. This 2019 virus is a new strain of coronavirus that has not been previously identified in humans. The cases in the Wuhan pneumonia outbreak have tested negative for both SARS and MERS-CoV. ^{1,2}

How is it transmitted?

The virus can be spread by individuals from 2 days before and until 14 days after the onset of symptoms.³ Precautions must therefore be taken to prevent human-to-human transmission of the disease. Currently, COVID-19 has been shown to spread by:

- Large respiratory droplets often produced by coughing or sneezing which land on a person or surface and transferred to the mouth or nose
- Direct or indirect contact with infected secretions
- Body fluids (e.g., blood, saliva, sputum, nasal mucus, vomit, urine, or diarrhea)

¹ CDC, 2020. Update and Interim Guidance on Outbreak of 2019 Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV) in Wuhan, China available at <https://emergency.cdc.gov/han/han00426.asp>

² The 2019-nCoV Outbreak Joint Field Epidemiology Investigation Team, Qun Li. An Outbreak of NCIP (2019-nCoV) Infection in China — Wuhan, Hubei Province, 2019–2020[J]. China CDC Weekly, 2020,2(5): 79-80.

³ WHO, 2020. Global surveillance for COVID-19 caused by human infection with COVID-19 virus.

<https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/331506/WHO-2019-nCoV-SurveillanceGuidance-2020.6-eng.pdf>

- Increasing evidence has led the WHO to indicate recently that airborne transmission cannot be ruled out at this point.⁴
- The COVID-19 virus **may** be spread by individuals that exhibit no symptoms

Purpose of these guidelines

This guidance recognizes that in many Caribbean countries, sex work is either illegal and or unrecognised as formal employment. The intent of these guidelines is not to undermine any country's legal position on sex work. Instead, it has been developed with a harm reduction lens to help reduce the risks associated with sex work, including in-person contact. The guidance is developed in the context that many sex workers are typically either self-employed or work as independent contractors and have continued to provide their services during the COVID-19 pandemic, despite the risks. The reality is that sex work can be a critical means of exposure to COVID-19 illness. It is against this background that these guidelines are developed, aimed at keeping sex workers and their clients safe from COVID-19 illness.

These guidelines are meant to guide sex workers, their employers and those who provide care and support for them (such as health care services, NGOs and civil society organisations), to maintain health and safety of sex workers within the COVID-19 environment. The guidelines emphasise the need for the continued use of established good hygiene guidelines along with the guidelines produced by their national health and safety authorities.

Definition of Sex Worker

In the context of these guidelines, sex workers include transgender, female, male, and non-binary adults and young people (over 18 years of age) who receive money or goods in exchange for sexual services, either regularly or occasionally and regardless of the fact that their work is recognized by law. These persons may range from street workers, to escorts, to exotic masseuses and may not necessarily consider this work to be income generating.⁵

Main Considerations for Persons Performing Sex Work

There are several issues to be addressed with Sex Workers during COVID-19. The impact of travel restrictions, business closures, self-isolation and or quarantine requirements have resulted in an unprecedented loss of work and income for sex workers. Regardless of the legal status of sex work in each country, the following realities have been documented:

- Sex workers are often marginalised and have limited if any support systems during times of crisis.

⁴ WHO, 2020. Transmission of SARS-CoV-2: implications for infection prevention precaution. 9 July 2020 <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/modes-of-transmission-of-virus-causing-covid-19-implications-for-ipc-precaution-recommendations>.

⁵ UNAIDS. HIV and sexually transmitted infection prevention among sex workers in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. UNAIDS best practice collection) "UNAIDS/06.10E". Accessed on 21 July from https://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media_asset/jc1212-hivpreveasterneurcentrasia_en_0.pdf

- Sex workers may not have access to financial support, relief, or social support packages due to the often unrecognised, criminalised and or informal nature of their business.
- Sex workers may be forced to continue to work under unsafe conditions to sustain or obtain an income.
- The need for physical intimacy poses a significant risk of exposure to infection with COVID-19, other bloodborne and sexually transmitted diseases. Sex workers face the risk of becoming further marginalised if they transmit or become a source of transmission of COVID-19 to their clients.
- Contact tracing may become a challenge for persons who do sex work, considering the threat to personal and client privacy.

The following guidelines are provided within this context.

A. Reduce Risk to The Sex Worker

1. Personal protection:

- CARPHA's infographics on [prevention measures for COVID -19](#)⁶
- Maintain basic hand and respiratory hygiene.
- Frequently clean hands by using alcohol-based hand rub (60-80% ethanol or isopropanol) or soap and water, prior to engaging with client. CARPHA's hand hygiene infographics on [hand washing](#)⁷ and [hand sanitiser](#)⁸ are available for printing (See Annex 2)
- When coughing and sneezing cover mouth and nose with flexed elbow or tissue – throw tissue away immediately and wash hands.
- Avoid close contact with anyone who has fever and cough.
- Considering wearing a mask. More details on choosing the right mask are provided in CARPHA's guidance on the use of masks⁹ with associated printable infographics on [cloth/homemade masks \(Annex 3a\)](#),¹⁰ and [face masks](#)¹¹ (Annex 3b)
- If you develop a fever, cough and difficulty breathing after interacting with a client, self-isolate and seek medical attention promptly according to local guidelines.
- Keep tissues on hand that can be provided if the client is sneezing or coughing.
- Avoid contact with tissues and other products contaminated with body fluids, and ensure they are disposed of promptly and safely. If your hands or body parts make contact with contaminated or soiled materials, wash hands with soap and water immediately.

2. When interacting with clients:

- Avoid all forms of group sex
- Use appropriate protective measures for oral sex and kissing
- Refrain from hugging or kissing colleagues or clients.

⁶ CARPHA. [Infographics on Prevention of COVID-19](#)

⁷ CARPHA Hand Hygiene Infographics: Hand Wash

⁸ CARPHA Hand Hygiene Infographics: Hand Sanitizer

⁹ CARPHA. [Guidance on the Use of Face Masks](#)

¹⁰ CARPHA Infographics: Cloth/ Homemade Face Masks

¹¹ CARPHA Infographics: Face Masks

- Do not engage with clients that may have or have symptoms of COVID-19 such as coughing, and sore throat.
- Always wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Where soap and water are not available, immediately sanitise hands with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, containing between 60-80% ethanol or isopropanol or combination.
 - Cleanse hands in between each client, whenever you come in from outside or change locations, and after handling money.
- Require clients to thoroughly wash their hands and face with soap before contact. If there is no regular access to facilities with soap and water, carry a personal supply of hand sanitiser and require clients to use it.
- Wherever possible, avoid kissing, saliva exchange, mouth contact on skin, as well as putting objects in your mouth (including your fingers) that have touched the client.
- Instead of kissing and direct contact, consider offering alternative services and opt for sexual positions that minimize face-to-face contact.
- Avoid direct contact with bodily fluids.
- Use condoms, dental dams, and gloves.
- After appointments, clean and disinfect work surfaces and any materials or aids that were used. If possible, do not share eating utensils such as dishes or cutlery with others. If this cannot be avoided, wash thoroughly with soap and hot water and dry with a paper towel that is disposed of afterwards.
- Consider minimizing all nonessential international travel. If possible, screen clients who have been travelling to affected areas.
- Consider virtual modalities such as working online or by phone. Much like in-person sex work, you can either work privately or with a third party (like a commercial webcam platform or phone sex line). The amount of infrastructure and self-promotion needed depends on the modality of work to be done. Resources are available to provide safe options for non-contact work and the digital sex workspace. Additional resources online may be useful.¹²

B. Provide Guidelines for Clients:

The following Information is to guide clients to engage safely with sex workers:

- Wash hands with plain soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds
- Wash work surfaces and any materials that were used with soap and water, and then disinfect with diluted bleach solution, hydrogen peroxide or alcohol wipes.
 - Know that sex workers are already experts in keeping sanitary workspaces and practicing safe contact and have been keeping themselves safe for decades during flu seasons.

¹² Scarlett Alliance, Australia (2020). COVID-19 Impact and Response for Sex Workers Accessed on 22 July from <http://www.scarlettalliance.org.au/COVID-19/>



- Avoid engaging with sex workers if you have symptoms or have been exposed to COVID-19. Be mindful that sex workers' livelihood depends on this.
- If you are experiencing symptoms, remain at home and or seek medical advice from your healthcare provider.
- Consider electronic payments instead of cash, where feasible.
- If experiencing no symptoms, and meeting with sex workers, respect and adhere to their boundaries as usual, which in this case may include additional precautions around cleanliness and physical contact.
- Do not be predatory. Do not offer more money or make repeated requests to coerce a sex worker into providing risky services.
- Respect the wishes of the sex worker and comply with safety measures they implement.

C. Implement Guidelines for Sex on Premises.

- Develop a checklist of criteria to be met to resume or continue to offer sex on premises. These guidelines must clearly outline the roles and responsibilities and actions to be followed by sex workers, clients, and others they interact with on the premises.
- Consider posting a sign outside the establishment indicating that to protect the health of workers and the community, clients who are showing signs of COVID-19 cannot enter the premises.
- Signs should be erected at entry points "informing clients of COVID-19, their obligations and the right of brothels and workers to refuse service".

1. Scheduling Appointments

- Clients are advised that they must use a mask/face covering for the duration of their appointments.
- Clients can book appointments online before coming to the premises, where facilities are available to do so.
- Client appointments are scheduled by phone or online.
- Walk-in clients are asked to call from outside the premises to make an appointment.
- Waiting areas are not permitted.
- Clients are instructed to wait outside of the premises until their scheduled appointment. Clients are screened for symptoms of COVID-19 by staff when booking appointments.
- Clients are not permitted to bring guests unless this was indicated during appointment booking.
- Records of staff and client contact information (e.g. full name, telephone/email), including date and time at premises, service received are maintained on-site for contact tracing purposes, should the need arise.
- Ensure adequate time between appointments to ensure thorough cleaning and disinfection/sterilization of equipment, aids, and rooms between clients.

2. Signage at the Premises

- Signage for COVID-19 Health Assessment and the number of clients permitted at one time is posted at the entrance of the premises.
 - Clients with COVID-19 Symptoms and/or who have been in contact with someone with COVID19 are not permitted to enter the premises.
 - Signage for hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette is posted at the entrance and throughout the premises.
 - Floor stickers and physical distancing signage are always available in high visibility areas to remind clients to keep two metres/six feet apart from others. Further details are provided in CARPHA [Infographics on Social Distancing](#).¹³
 - Seating in waiting areas at brothels should be removed,
 - Cash transactions would be kept to a minimum
- 3. Limit the Number of People in the Premises**
- The number of staff and clients is restricted to ensure ease of movement and to maintain two metres/six feet between people.
 - Flexible work schedules and staggered lunch and break times are implemented to limit the number of people in the premises at one time.
- 4. Bedrooms or Workstations**
- Rooms used for sex work must have adequate facilities, such as hand washing facilities, equipped with soap and water, alcohol-based hand sanitiser and showers, and ensure that sex aids and tools and are not shared between workers.
- 5. Providing Services**
- A mask/face covering is used by staff and clients, even when physical distancing and barriers/dividers are used (Annex 3).
 - Disposable masks are available on the premises to provide to clients when needed.
 - Limit face-to- face contact; provide disposable masks to staff and clients, where contact is required.

D. Prioritise Cleaning and Disinfection

- Sex workers, owners, and operators of Sex on premises venues must ensure that a robust cleaning and sanitation program is included as part of their routine business. This will help to reduce risks to staff, workers, and their clients. Detailed cleaning procedures are outlined in the CARPHA's Guidance on Resuming Office Operations as it relates to the COVID-19 Pandemic in the Caribbean¹⁴ and Safe Handling, Use and Disposal of Chemical Disinfectants and Cleaning Agents¹⁵
- Provide cleaning rules for shared equipment and facilities and ensure staff are aware of these.

¹³ [CARPHA. Infographic on Social Distancing](#)

¹⁴ Guidance on Resuming Office Operations as it relates to the COVID-19 Pandemic in the Caribbean
[https://www.carpha.org/Portals/0/Documents/Technical Guidance/COVID19 Guidelines Re-Opening of Offices.pdf](https://www.carpha.org/Portals/0/Documents/Technical%20Guidance/COVID19%20Guidelines%20Re-Opening%20of%20Offices.pdf)

¹⁵ Safe Handling, Use and Disposal of Chemical Disinfectants and Cleaning Agents
<https://www.carpha.org/Portals/0/Images/COVID-19%20Infographics/Cleaning%20and%20Sanitisation/DisinfectantsAndCleaningAgents-COVID19-CARPHA.pdf>

- Develop a cleaning schedule and ensure this is followed.
- Frequently clean high-touch surfaces with water and detergent and by applying commonly used disinfectants (such as properly diluted bleach)¹⁶.
- Staff do not need to wear eye protection or a protective gown while cleaning. Gloves provide sufficient protection unless the cleaning agent recommends more protective equipment.
- Office equipment, laundry, food utensils, and waste should be managed in accordance with normal, safe routine procedures.
- Should a client or staff member be identified as a suspect case, staff should feel safe to clean the environment as basic cleaning agents will sufficiently kill the virus.
- Clean and disinfect bathroom and toilet surfaces at least three times daily with regular household cleaners and disinfectant.
- Ensure that any waste, including waste contaminated with body fluids is bagged and securely stored and regularly collected by the waste management system.¹⁷
- If soap and water are not available, disinfectant solutions should be sufficient if the surface is not visibly soiled (See Annex 5).
- Wear gloves when handling disinfecting products, especially bleach.
- When disinfecting, open a window so the fumes from the products do not aggravate your throat or breathing.
- To dilute bleach, use room temperature water, not hot water. See bleach mixing instruction below, allow the surface to remain wet for one minute.
- Do not mix bleach with vinegar or other acids, ammonia, cleaning solutions, or rubbing alcohol. This can create toxic gases or corrosive materials that can cause damage.
- Wash and dry sheets and towels in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. Use the warmest possible water settings. Dry all items thoroughly

E. Seek Additional Guidance from Reliable Sources

Recognising the issues surrounding sex work, the associated stigma and marginalisation, individuals and businesses involved in sex work should seek support and additional information from NGOs and Civil society organisations working to advocate for and support these groups.

CARPHA has developed a set of guidelines to guide sectors in their re-opening efforts. Some of these guidelines may provide additional information that can be useful to persons involved with sex work. These guidelines are often accompanied by infographics that can be printed and used as posters as part of signage and or public education material. These guidelines are updated as new evidence becomes available and are accessible from <https://www.carpha.org/What-We-Do/Public-Health/Novel-Coronavirus>. Some examples include:

- CARPHA's Guidelines for [Hospitality: Hotels and Guesthouses](#)

¹⁶ Use household disinfectant containing a diluted bleach solution (that is, 1-part bleach to 99 parts water or 1½ tablespoons of bleach to 9.9 cups of water). For surfaces that cannot be cleaned with bleach, 70% ethanol can be used. The US EPA provides a list of disinfectant products that can destroy coronavirus: [epa.gov/listn](https://www.epa.gov/listn).

¹⁷ Interim COVID-19 Guidelines for Water, Sanitation, Hygiene, and Waste Management in Institutional Facilities, Communities and Home Settings. [https://www.carpha.org/Portals/0/Documents/Technical Guidance/COVID-19 WASH Guideline.pdf](https://www.carpha.org/Portals/0/Documents/Technical%20Guidance/COVID-19%20WASH%20Guideline.pdf)



- CARPHA's [FAQ-Chemical Agent Safety](#)
 - CARPHA's [Guidelines for Cleaning at Hotels and Guest houses](#)
 - CARPHA's [Guidelines and Checklists for Reopening of Caribbean Tourism and Travel](#)
 - CARPHA's [Guidelines for Domestic Workers during COVID-19](#)
 - CARPHA [Guidance on the use of face masks](#)
 - CARPHA's [COVID-19 Workplace Checklist](#)
 - CARPHA's [Guidance for the Retail Sector](#)
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- CARPHA's [Guidance on Resuming Office Operations as it relates to the COVID-19 Pandemic in the Caribbean](#)
 - CARPHA's [Public Transportation Guidelines](#)
 - CARPHA's Guidelines on [Protection of Persons Living with Non-communicable Diseases as it relates to the COVID-19 Pandemic in the Caribbean](#)
 - CARPHA's [Guidance on Health Considerations for Readmission of Visitors in Prisons in CARICOM Member States](#)



References:

1. British Columbia MOH. COVID-19 Sex Workers Guidance. http://www.bccdc.ca/Health-Info-Site/Documents/COVID19_SexWorkersGuidance.pdf

Sex work COVID-19 guidelines for sex workers, clients, third-parties and allies.

<https://drugpolicy.ca/sex-work-covid-19-guidelines-for-sex-workers-clients-third-parties-and-allies/>

2. Scarlett Alliance Australia. COVID-19 Impact and Response for Sex Workers. <http://www.scarletalliance.org.au/COVID-19/>

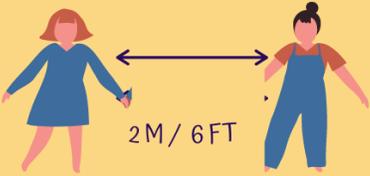
3. Sex workers outline proposal for industry to start up again during pandemic. Available from <https://www.news.com.au/finance/work/at-work/sex-workers-outline-proposal-for-industry-to-start-up-again-during-pandemic/news-story/ed0945854e7c0de16d56daa5518aca04>

Annex 1: COVID-19 Prevention Measures



PREVENTION OF COVID-19

COVID-19 is transmitted between people *via respiratory droplets and contact routes*. Precautions must be taken to prevent human-to-human spread of the disease.



MAINTAIN PHYSICAL DISTANCING

Keep at least 2 metres (6 feet) away from persons that do not live in your household; avoid crowds



HAND HYGIENE

Wash your hands with soap and running water (20 sec) or use an alcohol based hand rub (60-80% ethanol or isopropanol)



FACE MASKS

Use face masks in public spaces, e.g. wear a face mask when going to the grocery or market



COUGH AND SNEEZE ETIQUETTE

Cough and sneeze into your elbow or sleeve, if tissue is not available



SEEK MEDICAL ATTENTION

If you have fever, cough and difficulty breathing, seek medical attention early and share previous travel history



STAY HOME IF ILL

If you develop symptoms, stay home; seek medical care



AVOID CONTACT

Avoid touching, hugging and hand shaking

Suggested citation: Caribbean Public Health Agency. (2020, July 21). *Infographic: Prevention of COVID-19*. Retrieved from <https://www.carpha.org/What-We-Do/Public-Health/Novel-Coronavirus/COVID-19-Communications-Material#infographics>

Annex 2: Hand Hygiene

COVID-19 Coronavirus Disease



How to hand wash with soap and water



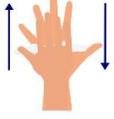
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1. Wet hands with water



2. Apply enough soap to cover all hand surfaces



3. Rub hands palm to palm
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4. Right palm over left dorsum with interlaced fingers and vice versa



5. Palm to palm with fingers interlaced



6. Backs of fingers to opposing palms with fingers interlocked



7. Rotational rubbing of left thumb clasped in right palm and vice versa
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8. Rotational rubbing, backwards and forwards with clasped fingers of right hand in left palm and vice versa



9. Rinse with water



10. Dry thoroughly with single use towel



11. Use towel to turn off pipe

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COVID-19 Coronavirus Disease



How to hand rub with alcohol-based sanitiser



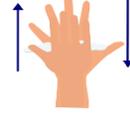
*Use sanitiser with 60-80% alcohol content (ethanol or isopropanol)

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1. Apply a palmful of the product in a cupped hand and cover all surfaces



2. Rub hands palm to palm



3. Right palm over left dorsum with interlaced fingers and vice versa
- 

4. Palm to palm with fingers interlaced



5. Backs of fingers to opposing palms with fingers interlocked



6. Rotational rubbing of left thumb clasped in right palm and vice versa
- 

7. Rotational rubbing, backwards and forwards with clasped fingers of right hand in left palm and vice versa



8. Once dry, your hands are safe.

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Annex 3: Appropriate Use of Face Mask



HOW TO WEAR, USE AND REMOVE A CLOTH/HOME-MADE FACE MASK

Coronavirus (COVID-19)





Perform hand hygiene using either soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub 60-80% alcohol content (ethanol or isopropanol). This must be done before putting on the face mask and after removing it.



Hold the face mask by the straps **ONLY**. Place loops over each ear. Do not touch the inside of the mask.

Make sure the mask completely covers your nose and mouth.



The face mask should fit from the bridge of your nose down til your chin.

Make sure that there are no gaps between your face and the mask.



Only wear the mask for tasks/activities which require its use.

Do not touch your face or your mask. If you touch your mask accidentally, perform hand hygiene.



Hold the face mask by the straps and remove the mask by pulling it away from your face.

Do not touch the front of the mask. Perform hand hygiene after removing the mask.



After using a **cloth mask**, place it in a resealable plastic bag. Wash immediately after use with detergent at 60 °C.

Keep clean cloth masks in one bag and used ones in another bag.

www.carpha.org Updated: July 3, 2020.



HOW TO PUT ON, USE AND TAKE OFF A FACE MASK

Coronavirus (COVID-19)





Perform hand hygiene using either soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub.

This must be done before putting on the face mask and after removing it.



Hold the face mask by the straps **ONLY**. Place loops over each ear. Do not touch the inside of the mask.

Make sure the mask completely covers your nose and mouth.



The face mask should fit from the bridge of your nose down til your chin.

Make sure that there are no gaps between your face and the mask.



Only wear the mask for tasks/activities which require its use.

Do not touch your face or your mask. If you touch your mask accidentally, perform hand hygiene.



Hold the face mask by the straps and remove the mask by pulling it away from your face.

Do not touch the front of the mask.



For a **single-use mask**, carefully dispose of the mask by placing it into a closed bin.

Do not reuse a single use mask. Perform hand hygiene after removing the face mask.



After using a **cloth mask**, place it in a resealable plastic bag.

Perform hand hygiene after removing the face mask.



Wash cloth masks immediately after use with detergent at 60 °C.

Keep clean cloth masks in one bag and used ones in another bag.

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Annex 4: Cleaning Process

THE CLEANING PROCESS



Routine detergents and disinfectants are sufficient to remove and kill COVID-19.



★ Always follow the instructions on the cleaning agents for how to dilute and apply to different surfaces.

- 1**



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3



Start by cleaning the surface of any dirt or visible soiling.

 - ▶ Use a clean cloth or sponge
 - ▶ Use warm or hot water
 - ▶ Use an appropriate soap or detergent for the surface
- Make sure to change the water and cloth or sponge frequently.**

 - ▶ Remember to disinfect the sponge or cloth before reuse
- After cleaning the surface, or if not visibly soiled, it can be sanitised or disinfected.**

 - ▶ Bleach (sodium hypochlorite) should be diluted to 0.1% and in contact with surfaces for 10 minutes
 - ▶ Alcohol used should be at least 70% and should be allowed to dry on the surface to be effective