



Does your onboard hygiene management cover high touch surfaces?

Although not visible to the naked eye, germs live among us. They are more likely to be present on surfaces which people touch quite frequently with their hands. These are known as 'high touch surfaces'.

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Typical examples are equipment controls such as for radar, door handles, light switches, handrails, keyboards, mobile phones, television remote controls, taps, etc. Germs can survive on some surfaces for anything from a few hours to a few days and personnel can get infected if they touch such surfaces and then touch their nose, mouth or eyes. Hand mediated transmission is after all a major contributor to the spread of viruses, such as flu.

It is therefore important to eradicate the germs from these surfaces to ensure that they do not enter our bodies and infect us. To reduce the risk of such infections:

- Firstly, identify and disinfect high touch surfaces regularly; and
- Secondly, practice good hand hygiene which involves washing or disinfecting your hands regularly. We covered this in our earlier alert [‘Be a handwash hero!’](#)

On the topic of high touch surfaces, the first step for the crew is to identify them. Their identification would depend on various factors such as:

- Type of space, i.e. is it a public space, including work spaces, or a private space. Areas like navigation bridge, engine control room, cargo control room and mess rooms are likely to have numerous high touch surfaces compared to some of the other areas onboard.
- Spaces visited by infected personnel;
- Surfaces frequently touched by crew in their normal day to day activities.

Crew should be aware that some high touch surfaces may be obscured, such as the back side of a door handle and thus may be missed during the identification process.

Once high touch surfaces have been identified, the next step is to establish a disinfection routine or a schedule for the crew to follow. These areas need to be prioritized compared to minimal contact surfaces. As the chemicals used in the disinfection process can be harmful to the body, crew should read the application and safety instructions mentioned on the product used before applying it.

To conclude, it is important that crew understand that high touch surfaces can be a reservoir of infections and viruses. It is for their own health that identifying and disinfecting such surfaces should be a part of onboard hygiene management.

Gard loss prevention material

Poster: [Germs%20among%20us_Lores.pdf](#)

Poster: [Gard_hand_washing_Lowres.pdf](#)

Useful links

- ['Cleaning and disinfecting public spaces'](#) by Public Health Agency of Canada
- ['Cleaning for Infection Prevention: Cold and Flu'](#) by International Sanitary Supply Association (ISSA)
- ['Advisory on Surface Cleaning and Disinfection for COVID-19'](#) by National Environment Agency, Singapore

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