

Security Guards and the Coronavirus

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Frontline security guards typically have free access throughout the workplace while being exposed to large numbers of people, thus increasing the viral infection risk potential for both the guard and public. Coronaviruses are not a single virus but a family of viruses such as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Human Coronavirus (HCoV) to name a few.

The purpose of this article is to give frontline security guards the information they need in order to protect themselves not only from coronaviruses but also from other forms of infectious illness of which they may be exposed to, or from exposing others. The same strategy and process in protecting oneself and reducing the risk of illness equally applies to high risk viruses as well as the flu and cold.

HAND WASHING

Regular hand washing is the most important and first line of defence against disease. According to a 2009 study conducted by the Public Health Agency of Canada, 80% of infectious diseases are spread through contaminated surfaces and hands.¹ Furthermore, regular hand washing throughout the day has been shown to reduce gastrointestinal illnesses such as vomiting and diarrhea by 31% and respiratory illnesses such as colds and flu by 21%.²

Be aware of situations when you must wash your hands:

- Before and after using the washroom
- Before and after eating
- Before and after assisting people who may be sick or injured
- After using shared or public accessible touch screens, pens, telephones, keyboards, etc.
- After using public transit
- After handling or contact with waste, garbage or body fluids

- After blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing into your hands
- After visiting a medical office, hospital or first aid room
- When your hands are dirty

How to Wash Your Hands by the Numbers

This should take you at least 20 seconds to do to ensure your hands are clean.

1. Wet your hands with warm water
2. Apply liquid soap
3. Scrub your hands, palm on palm
4. Scrub your hands, palm to back
5. Scrub each thumb by putting one hand around it and twisting
6. Scrub between your fingers by interlacing your fingers and moving them back and forth
7. Use your palm to scrub the knuckles of the opposite hand
8. Rub your fingertips in the palm of the opposite hand to clean fingertip and nail areas
9. Rinse your hands in warm water to get all the soap off
10. Dry your hands with a paper towel
11. Use the towel to turn off the tap and open the door
12. Your hands are now clean!

Some things to consider

- Moist hands promote the growth of germs, so be sure to dry your hands thoroughly.
- Air dryers have been proven to re-circulate and spread germs in areas, and increase germs on hands. Furthermore, many smaller washrooms place the air dryer above or adjacent to rubbish bins where hot air is blown into the garbage causing even more germs to circulate further in the room on a wave of warm air.
- Always keep your hands away from your face as the germs you may have picked up on your hands will be able to enter your body through your mouth, eyes or nose and make you ill.

HAND SANITIZER

Hand sanitizer is an excellent way to kill germs when washing with soap and water is not possible. However, hand sanitizer unlike soap and water does not remove the germs from your hands but does kill them. This is the main reason why you should not use hand sanitizer instead of washing your hands before eating or preparing food. As well, hand sanitizer should not be used after using the washroom, but rather you must wash your hands.

How to Use Hand Sanitizer by the Numbers

This should take you at least 20 seconds to ensure all the germs on your hands have been killed.

1. Apply hand sanitizer
2. Scrub your hands, palm on palm
3. Scrub your hands, palm to back
4. Scrub each thumb by putting one hand around it and twisting
5. Scrub between your fingers by interlacing your fingers and moving them back and forth
6. Use your palm to scrub the knuckles of the opposite hand
7. Rub your fingertips in the palm of the opposite hand to clean fingertip and nail areas
8. You have killed the germs!

Some things to consider

- Hand sanitizer should stay on your hands for at least 20 seconds to be effective.
- Hand sanitizer is flammable and must not be stored near heat or used near an open flame.
- Always check the hand sanitizer bottle for its expiry date before using.
- While public hand sanitizer stations help promote hand health, remember the outside of the sanitizer bottle, dispenser and nozzle may have germs, so avoid touching these after you have used hand sanitizer or washed your hands.
- If your hands are visibly dirty, hand sanitizer will be of little use since the germs may be underneath the dirt which the sanitizer cannot remove. In order to do this, you must wash your hands with warm soap and water.

PERSONAL HYGIENE

Hand washing and hand sanitizing are your first lines of defence against becoming ill or causing others to become ill.

However, it is also important to:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue whenever you sneeze or cough. Then immediately throw away the tissue in the rubbish bin. Do not place it in your pocket. Do not reuse it.
- If you do not have a tissue, cough/sneeze in your elbow or armpit, not in your hand. As you may inhale or place germs from or in your hand, or contact the germs of others you may have picked up.
- Wash your hands or use hand sanitizer after blowing your nose or coughing into your hands.
- Keep your hands clean and do not touch your face.
- If you feel ill, do not go to work and see your doctor. Don't share your illness with those you work with!

YOUR WORKSPACE

It has been documented Human Coronavirus (HCoV) can live on non-porous surfaces such as metal, glass and plastic for up to 9 days.³ The virus is spread by microscopic water droplets released primarily by sneezing, coughing and blowing noses which end up placing these invisible to the eye droplets in the air, on hands and surfaces such as desks, doorknobs, handrails, chairs, clothing and on many other common surfaces in the workspace and public areas.

Disinfect hard surfaces

Work surfaces such as desks, telephones, computer mice and keyboards, touch screens, communal pens, and vinyl, faux leather or plastic chairs should be cleaned at least once each shift with a disinfectant wipe or spray, or isopropyl wipe. Wipes and sprays cannot and should not be used on cloth upholstered chairs. When using disinfectant and isopropyl wipes it is important to note the expiration date on the container and follow the instructions as to how long the surface needs to remain wet from the wipe in order to ensure the germs are killed.

Disinfecting surfaces in your workspace reduces the risk of having live germs transferred from these surfaces to your hands. However, a surface with germs on it poses no direct threat by itself unless it is touched and later on, you place your hand to your face.

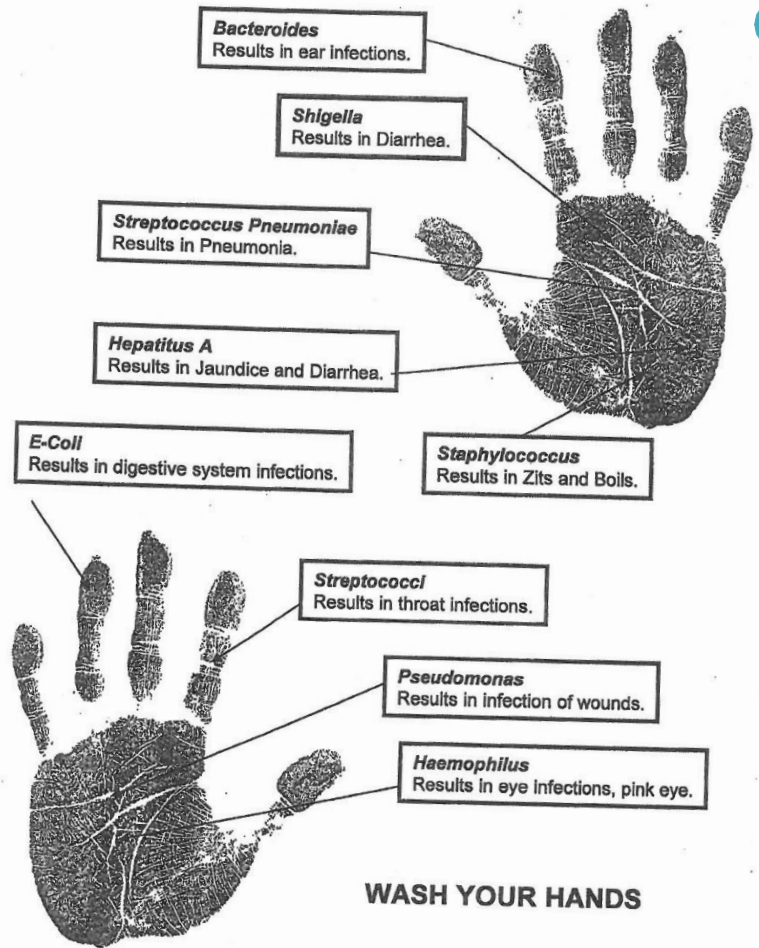
On Patrol

One of the main duties of a security guard is to conduct hourly patrols. These patrols will have the security guard touch numerous surfaces throughout a shift. One particular item that will be touched throughout a building during patrol are doorknobs. It has been well documented even in the best of times, that after touching six doorknobs not less than nine different varieties of germs can be found to have been transferred onto a person's hand. These germs are capable of causing ear and digestive system infections to pink eye and pneumonia.

Security guards that do patrols and touch multiple doorknobs, doors, handrails, etc., should wear washable work gloves to provide a barrier between themselves and contaminated surfaces. Of course, gloved hands must never touch the face (nose, eyes, mouth). When gloves are removed, hands must be washed as soon as possible. Work gloves used for patrol should be washed at least weekly or semi-weekly. Wearing work gloves provides a barrier between hands and germs in order to reduce the amount of germs on the hands. Wearing disposable rubber gloves for patrols is not recommended as long term wear of these gloves over a shift becomes uncomfortable as most of these gloves are designed for single, one time use only.

When on patrol or on public transit, wear work gloves to provide a barrier between your hands and contaminated surfaces.

After Touching 6 Doorknobs These Are Germs That Could Be on Your Hands!



MASKS

Masks under medical advisement, are used by individuals who already have been or may be infected by a virus with the purpose of the mask, if worn correctly, to reduce the spread of water droplets containing their infection when they sneeze, cough or speak in the presence of others.

There are four main reasons why the Western medical community does not promote the wearing of masks by healthy people. First, while the mask if it is worn correctly, may provide some protection from breathing infected water droplets through the mouth or nose of a healthy person, it must be noted these droplets can infect a healthy person through unprotected eyes, equating the protection to minimal at best. Secondly, in order to properly protect the wearer, detailed instruction in the correct donning, doffing and adjusting of the mask is required. Thirdly, protective masks from surgical masks, N95 to N99 masks are not designed to be worn for periods of hours and become quite uncomfortable causing the wearer to temporarily remove the mask and expose themselves. Fourthly, the wearing of a mask creates fear in the general public which as a result of panic causes the supply of masks to be depleted for those infected and in the medical community who may need them.

It is always good advice to avoid close contact with anyone showing symptoms of respiratory illness such as coughing and sneezing.

HOW DO I KNOW IF I, OR SOMEONE ELSE HAS CONTRACTED THE CORONAVIRUS?

The common symptoms of Coronavirus are:

- a cough
- a high temperature (fever)
- shortness of breath (difficulty breathing)

Having these symptoms do not necessarily mean you or anyone has the Coronavirus as these symptoms are also present when people have the cold or flu. In severe cases of Coronavirus, the infection can cause pneumonia, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), organ failure and death. It is important if you suspect you have the Coronavirus that you seek medical attention as soon as possible.⁴

SELF-ISOLATION

If after seeking medical attention, it is suspected you may have coronavirus or have travelled to an area where you may have been exposed to the virus, you will be asked to self-isolate (stay away from other people) for a period of up to 14 days.

This means you should stay at home, not have visitors, not go to work or out in the public and definitely not use public transit or taxis. If you need something, it is highly recommended you have it delivered to your home by a delivery service, friends or family. However, you should not invite them into your home in the event you may make them ill.

Countries that have been identified where coronavirus exposure is prevalent are: Cambodia, China, Hong Kong, Iran, Italy, Japan, Laos, Macau, Malaysia, Myanmar (Burma), Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand and Vietnam.

CONCLUSION

In this article I have covered the current best practices in managing the risk of viruses and associated infection within the scope of frontline security guards. Whether there is the threat of a global viral incident or not, maintaining good personal disease risk management, benefits everyone. Ultimately it all comes down to hand washing and reducing your exposure to germs.

Sources

¹Public Health Agency of Canada. (2009). *Get the dirt on clean hands.*

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⁴World Health Organization. (2020). *Health Topics: Coronavirus.*

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