

EPA Can Help You Keep It Clean in a World with COVID-19

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Virus-killing myths, like gargling salt water, are floating around as fast as toilet paper has flown off the grocery store shelves.

When those shelves are restocked, what is effective for cleaning surfaces in residential, commercial, and industrial environments? The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency ("EPA") has released a list of EPA-registered disinfectant products that have qualified for use against SARS-CoV-2, the novel coronavirus that causes COVID-19.

Along with hand washing and social distancing, cleaning and disinfecting with effective products are an important part of slowing the spread of the virus. The EPA published the list with other important information on disinfectant products and links to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) to inform the public and help reduce the spread of COVID-19. According to the EPA's accompanying press release, coronaviruses are "enveloped viruses, meaning they are one of the easiest types of viruses to kill with the appropriate disinfectant product. Consumers using these disinfectants on an enveloped emerging virus should follow the directions for use on the product's master label, paying close attention to the contact time for the product on the treated surface (i.e., how long the disinfectant should remain on the surface)."

How do we know the listed products are effective and not a scam? The EPA developed its Emerging Viral Pathogen program in 2016 to allow manufacturers to voluntarily provide EPA with data to show their products are effective against viruses. The purpose of the program was to gather the information through a pre-approval process so that if an outbreak occurs, companies with pre-approved products can make off-label claims for the use of the products against the outbreak virus. That planning proved fruitful: the use of the program was triggered for the first time for SARS-CoV-2 on January 29, 2020.

The EPA's list includes recognizable products such as Clorox Multi-Surface Cleaner + Bleach and Lysol Brand Bleach Mold and Mildew Remover but is not meant to serve as an agency endorsement of any particular product as there may be additional disinfectants it has not reviewed that do meet the program's criteria. The EPA recommends to consumers to check if the EPA registration number that is on the product's label ("EPA Reg. No.") is included on the program list of disinfectants for use against SARS-CoV-2 to ensure the product can be used effectively. Products can be marketed and sold under different brand names, but if they have the same EPA registration number, they are the same underlying product and can be used.

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