WHY DOES CONTACT TIME MATTER FOR DISINFECTATION?

To disinfect correctly, we need to understand contact time. CONTACT TIME is the amount of time a disinfectant needs to stay in place. REMEMBER: The job of a disinfectant is to kill germs.

CONTACT TIME

Dwell Time or Wet Time

In the United States, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) reviews and registers disinfectants to ensure they are safe to use in workplaces. A disinfectant’s contact time is found on the label. Labels that say “HOSPITAL GRADE” identify disinfectants you can use in healthcare settings. When using a disinfectant, it is important to follow the label instructions.

These instructions tell you:

- Which surfaces the disinfectant can be used on
- Which germs it can kill
- Whether it needs to be diluted

Do not dilute—adding water reduces the concentration down to a safe and correct level to kill germs.

REMEMBER: A disinfectant may not kill germs right away. It takes time for germs to react with a disinfectant. Contact time can vary depending on the disinfectant you are using and the germ you are targeting. When you disinfect, do not rush the process.

In hospitals, it is important to wait for the contact time to finish before using a surface. This can be hard to do, but you want to get your patients in and out quickly. So you may feel pressure to move fast. However, the risk of spreading germs is greater.

When you disinfect a surface, you want to do it correctly to keep patients safe!

If you are a supervisor, your room and equipment turnover plans should account for the contact time of disinfectants your colleagues use. If turnover time is a concern, consider selecting another disinfectant that works best for the needed timelines, rather than use it incorrectly.

When you are aware of the contact time, you can kill germs in the correct way to reduce their spread to other PATIENTS, COLLEAGUES, AND PEOPLE.

For more information on topics like this, visit cdc.gov/projectfirstline. See all of NNPHI’s Project Firstline interactive learning experiences.