Cleaning, Sanitizing and Disinfecting Carpet to Reduce the Spread of Infection

The ongoing outbreak of coronavirus (COVID-19) continues to dominate headlines and infect thousands of new people per day around the world. China’s central bank is deep cleaning and even destroying money that may have been infected with coronavirus. Meanwhile, facilities such as offices, schools, hospitals, restaurants and hotels are ramping up cleaning and disinfecting of high-touch surfaces in an effort to curb the spread of the infection.

During this time, facilities should not overlook the importance of proper carpet maintenance. Being mindful of the differences between cleaning, sanitizing and disinfecting carpet will help facility managers best protect occupants and visitors, as well as their carpet investment.
Cleaning vs. Sanitizing vs. Disinfecting Carpet

While there is not yet published research available on how long COVID-19 lives on surfaces, the World Health Organization notes that “coronaviruses may persist on surfaces for a few hours or up to several days.” Thus, it’s critical that facility managers pay attention to both hard and soft surfaces, including carpet.

Consider the differences between cleaning, sanitizing and disinfecting carpet:

How to Clean Carpet

According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), carpet installation is often recommended for facilities like schools and healthcare facilities, as carpet “acts as a reservoir for dust, dirt, pollen, mold spores, pesticides and other materials.” While carpet helps to improve indoor air quality (IAQ), it is important to thoroughly clean carpet on a regular basis to remove the build-up of soil and other potentially harmful particles that settle deep into carpet fibers.

To properly clean carpet, first use a vacuum that is certified by the Carpet and Rug Institute. It’s also important to find a vacuum with high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filters that trap 99.97% of airborne particles. Ensure that the vacuum has been properly maintained, as faulty or poorly constructed filters can fail to capture build up in carpet fibers.

Then, incorporate low-moisture encapsulation cleaning, which relies on less water and allows carpet to dry faster. Look for a two- or three-brush machine that lifts the carpet pile and agitates the chemistry into the carpet fibers to achieve a top-to-bottom clean. The machine should be able to clean large spaces within a relatively short timeframe. For instance, Whittaker’s Smart Care® machines can clean up to 20,000 square feet per hour. Choose high-quality chemistry that will help your facility achieve cleanliness with minimal effort.
How to Sanitize Carpet

It’s possible to sanitize carpet using hydrogen peroxide.

For sanitizing carpet, consider a product like Whittaker’s Crystal Quick Restore chemistry, which has 1.75% hydrogen peroxide. Employees who are responsible for cleaning carpet can double up on the solution by using two 12-ounce bottles for a 1:10 ratio. This will increase the percentage of hydrogen peroxide to 3.5%. However, it’s important not to go beyond 4%, as hydrogen peroxide levels higher than this can potentially damage natural carpet fibers.

Properly sanitizing a machine’s brushes helps to remove any lingering pathogens. Rather than using bleach, consider cleaning brushes with white vinegar or a peroxide solution. Meanwhile, use an approved disinfectant wipe or spray to clean the equipment. Be sure that employees wear the right personal protective equipment (PPE), such as gloves, to help prevent the spread of germs and follow the manufacturer’s instructions.

How to Disinfect Carpet

It’s important to note that while facilities can disinfect hard surfaces like countertops and hard flooring, according to the EPA, no disinfectant can claim to disinfect soft surfaces such as carpet.

A Continued Focus on Coronavirus

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has stated that coronavirus may continue to spread into 2021. With more infections and deaths being recorded each day, facilities need to have strategies in place to reduce its spread. Reviewing the differences between cleaning, sanitizing and disinfecting carpet will allow facility managers to understand potential limitations of these processes, and select the best solutions for protecting employees, patients, students, guests and building occupants.
Then, adhering to a regular carpet care and cleaning schedule using the right tools, machines and chemicals will ensure that facilities are addressing all soft and hard surfaces that may carry pathogens. Increasing the frequency of cleaning, sanitizing and disinfecting carpet during periods of increased illness can help curb the impact of outbreaks like coronavirus. Maintaining cleanliness even after the threat of an outbreak diminishes, is just as important to prevent future outbreaks from becoming widespread.

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