



## Best Practice Changeover Guidance Post Covid

May 2022

### Summary

- While Covid restrictions have been lifted by Government in the UK, the disease is still with us
- Many older and clinically vulnerable guests feel less safe now that restrictions have been removed
- Continuing to offer modified “Covid cleans” is reassuring to many guests
- 2-step cleaning (soap/detergent cleaning, then sanitising) is still recommended, and is reassuring to guests
- Transmission by touch is now understood to be much lower risk than inhalation, but...
- Sanitising surfaces and touch points offers protection against a wide range of viral and bacterial infection, not just Covid, so is good hygiene practice (and can be promoted)
- Many items that were removed from holiday properties during the period of restriction can now be returned to the cottages
- Guests are now less tolerant of “missing” or reduced count items in holiday cottages
- The AA “Covid Confident” scheme is still running, and can be used to promote your continued extra measures to ensure guests safety; and offers reassurance
- Fogging is **not** recommended by the WHO (as may cause other respiratory reactions such as triggering allergies)
- Using a tick list during changeovers ensures that no areas are missed (especially useful if more than one person is doing the changeover)
- Digital guest books are an excellent way of providing guest information without needing large quantities of printed materials
- Instructions (for appliances, heating, Wi-Fi codes, hot tub use, etc) can be laminated, or put in plastic sleeves in folders, making sanitising easy
- It can be useful to take photographs of each room post clean (insurance against spurious guest complaints)
- Don't forget during changeovers to do your Fire Safety checks (test fire/smoke and Carbon Monoxide (CO) alarms, check extinguisher pressure and fire blankets)
- Check light bulbs are working (including lamps) – saves being called up later
- Check leads and cables for signs of wear (kettles etc)
- Ensure kettles, coffee makers etc are emptied of water
- If property is empty for > 1 week, take precautions against Legionella risk

## Background

In collaboration with the ASSC and Premier Cottages, PASC UK originally launched the National Cleaning Protocols for Self-Catering in May 2020, when Covid was still a new disease, and the understanding of how it was spreading was less well understood than it is today.

At that time, it was necessary to create a stringent set of operating instructions for owners, so that the Government had confidence that we could re-open safely as a sector, and so that guests felt that self-catering was a safe environment to book for holidays once these were permitted. The Protocols required a high level of cleaning and disinfection, the wearing of PPE, and recommended removal of soft furnishings and non-essential items, among other measures.

As you will be aware, the Government removed all Covid restrictions in England at the end of March 2022. So, does that mean that we can totally abandon all the cleaning protocols? The removal of restrictions has created a period of uncertainty and alarm for many. While the vaccine programme has offered protection against serious disease, many of those in older age groups, and those who are clinically vulnerable, are feeling MORE anxious now that restrictions have been lifted, not less so. Their chances of contracting it increase as more and more people take fewer and fewer precautions to prevent spread, making it a worrying time for many.

We had very positive guest feedback from both owners and guests about the reassurance that the VisitEngland “Good to Go” and AA “Covid Confident” schemes have provided over the pandemic. Those of you who signed up to the VisitEngland “Good to Go” scheme will have had an email from VE to say they have scrapped the scheme and have requested removal of all logos on websites and social media by end April 2022.

Enhanced cleaning incurs extra time and extra costs for owners, but it does provide reassurance to guests, and we feel that there is still value in being able to demonstrate to guests that steps are still being taken by owners to minimise risk. The AA is planning on keeping its Covid Confident accreditation scheme in place for this reason. So, any owner wishing to continue to promote the fact that they are still going the extra mile to keep their guests safe can continue to market this by joining the AA scheme. There is no charge for this, but you will need to provide your Covid risk assessment and fill out a form. They will then send you the Covid Confident badging, which you can use on your website and social media. <https://www.ratedtrips.com/aa-covid-confident>. Those who are already participating in the scheme can continue to use the badging.

## What Measures Should I Still Take?

SARS-CoV-2, the virus which causes COVID-19 spreads through three main routes: inhalation of droplets suspended in the air, direct deposition of droplets on mucous membranes, and the carriage of virus particles from contaminated surfaces to the mucous membranes.

The relative importance of each route is still the subject of debate, but the evidence now suggests that surface transmission and direct droplet deposition are less significant, while the inhalation of droplets is more significant than thought at the beginning of the pandemic.

## Contact and surface transmission

SARS-CoV-2 can also be transmitted through contact with contaminated surfaces. When respiratory fluids from an infected person’s nose or mouth are deposited on a surface such as a door handle or railing, this can act as a means of transporting virus particles from an infected person to an uninfected person. Surfaces can become contaminated when an infected person sneezes or coughs

on them, or when the infected person touches their mouth or nose immediately before touching the surface. If someone else touches the contaminated surface and subsequently touches their mouth, nose, or eyes, they may become infected.

The risk of this occurring depends on many factors including the amount of virus on the surface, the material of the surface and the length of time since it was deposited. Furthermore, if virus is deposited on a surface that is frequently touched, more people are at risk of becoming infected. This type of transmission could also occur by direct contact with an infected person, for example during a handshake.

This will also be true of other viruses, such as flu and colds, and norovirus, so by taking appropriate measures you are offering guests wider protection than just from Covid. For this reason, we continue to recommend a 2-step cleaning process (clean, then disinfect).

### Which surface disinfectants are recommended to reduce spread of COVID-19?

Surfaces must be cleaned first with water and soap or a detergent to remove dirt, followed by disinfection. Cleaning should always start from the least soiled (cleanest) area to the most soiled (dirtiest) area in order to not spread the dirty to areas that are less soiled.

<https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/coronavirus-disease-covid-19-cleaning-and-disinfecting-surfaces-in-non-health-care-settings>

For disinfection, the WHO recommends that in non-health care settings, sodium hypochlorite (bleach / chlorine) may be used at a recommended concentration of 0.1% or 1,000ppm (1 part of 5% strength household bleach to 49 parts of water). Alcohol at 70-90% can also be used for surface disinfection. To be effective against viruses, you should look for the disinfecting products to conform to **British standard BS EN14476**. Many popular brands sold in the UK such as Dettol, Zoflora, etc as well as many proprietary supermarket brands meet these standards.

Particular attention should be paid to frequent touch point such as

- Door handles
- Banister rails
- Light switches
- TV remote controls
- Bin lids
- Fridge door handles
- Keyboards/touchscreens
- Etc

These may not all have previously been routinely cleaned in a busy changeover situation. It is worth noting that this will also protect against transmission of many other viruses, such as 'flu and colds, as well as Covid.

### I have a fogging machine. Should I still use it?

The WHO recommends that fogging is **NOT** used: "In indoor spaces, routine application of disinfectants to environmental surfaces via spraying or fogging (also known as fumigation or misting) is not recommended. Spraying environmental surfaces in both health care and non-healthcare settings (e.g., patient households) with disinfectants will not be effective and may pose harm to individuals." <https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/situation-reports/20200514-covid-19-sitrep-115.pdf>

## Should I put things back in the cottage (soft furnishings, toys, books etc)

Guidance at the height of the pandemic was to keep extraneous items to a minimum (soft furnishings, ornaments, toys, games, books etc), and to minimise the kitchen inventory so that all items could be re-washed between guests. With the removal of all restrictions, it is important to ensure that the guest experience is not detracted from by having properties so stripped back that they look basic, characterless or mean! However, attention should be paid to ensuring these are cleaned frequently.

## Guest Information

During Covid there was increasing use by owners of digital guest books such as TouchStay (<https://touchstay.com>) to provide sufficient information for guests during their stay without having to provide lots of paper guides. These have proved very popular with guests, as they can carry the information on local attractions etc on their mobile device, rather than having to take walking books/leaflets out with them on a day out. These guides are bespoke to your property and can be very comprehensive (you build them to your precise requirements). They also offer the ability to upload things like manuals for appliances, meaning you don't have to have tatty paper instruction books, which can get stained and accidentally put in the recycling by guests. There is still a place for physical information, especially if you are in an area of poor mobile or Wi-Fi reception. Key information such as Wi-Fi codes, heating instructions, hot tub operation etc, (and other key guest information) – information that guests will want access to quickly - can also be provided in the cottage on laminated sheets or in folders with plastic pockets to contain the information. These are then easy to wipe clean and stay looking pristine for longer.

## What About Crockery & Cutlery?

During peak Covid, the recommendation was to minimise the provision in kitchens, as every item had to be re-cleaned between guests. Many owners reduced the quantities of crockery, cutlery, cookware and kitchen gadgets for this reason. Now that restrictions have been lifted, these should all be returned. While guests understood the requirement at the time, it now just looks ill-equipped and “mean” to have only the bare minimum. Particularly in smaller properties (sleeps-2 for example), an insufficiency of crockery and cutlery is likely to mean that guests run the dishwasher more frequently than they would otherwise, which is a direct increased cost to you, at a time when energy prices have increased significantly.

## How About Soft Furnishings?

Items such as cushions and throws can add colour, character and comfort to a property, which is important for the guest experience. Such items should be washed regularly, and there are also many disinfectant sprays suitable for use on fabrics. If you used the “quarantine” method during Covid (carrying spare sets of cushions/throws/pillows etc and swapping out between guests), this is also an option.

Further information on living with Covid can be found on the Government website - <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/living-safely-with-respiratory-infections-including-covid-19>

## Other Recommended Steps During Changeovers - Fire Checks – Owners' Responsibilities

PASC UK has produced a guidance note on Fire Checks at Changeover – including a sample checklist - which can be downloaded in full here <https://www.pascuk.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/FIRE-CHECKS-AT-CHANGEOVER.pdf>

## Summary

Ensuring that a Furnished Holiday Let (FHL) is safe in terms of fire risk is the responsibility of owners and falls into two main areas:

- A written Fire Risk Assessment – identification of hazards, carrying out necessary works, reviewed annually. VisitEngland has a guide on how to write one, which has been fully updated in collaboration with the National Fire Chiefs Council. The guidance and template can be downloaded here <https://www.visitbritain.org/business-advice/complete-your-fire-risk-assessment>
- On-going inspection to ensure that a hazard has not developed during each letting.
- Fire Regs are slightly different in Scotland

Responsibilities for fire safety do not stop at the production of an FRA (Fire Risk Assessment). They are an on-going responsibility of the property owner. If for example there is no written record of smoke alarms being tested after each letting and there is a fire, there is no proof that the smoke alarms were working, and the owner has not shown due diligence. It is unlikely that an insurance company would cover the damage in these circumstances and any loss of life would ultimately be the fault of the owner.

## What Should Be Done at Each Changeover?

- Test smoke alarms to ensure that they are still working as designed. All smoke alarms should be linked so this should be a matter of pressing one and making sure all others also sound.
- Check the pressure dial on all extinguishers to ensure that this has not dropped below the threshold level. The dial is on the outside of the extinguisher, clearly visible.
- Examine the condition of wires on all household appliances to ensure that there is not excessive wear and tear, breakages in the protective cable etc. Remove any that are found to be in this condition.
- Remove any electrical items which no longer work.
- Ensure that all rubbish is removed from the property and the area immediately adjacent to it. Most fires external to properties start in accumulated rubbish.
- Ensure that no ignition sources are left in the property – matches, lighters etc. If you provide matches for log burners, make sure that they are kept out of reach of children.
- Check Carbon Monoxide monitors if applicable.
- The person carrying out the checks to complete and sign the checklist

## Checklists and Record-keeping

As every property is different each owner needs to draw up a property specific check list covering the items above.

- Draw up the checklists for fire safety for your property (example <https://bit.ly/3yiW2GX>)
- Make it clear to your cleaning team that this has to be done at each and every changeover.
- Ensure that staff know how to do this and how to easily incorporate it into their cleaning regime.

- Provide a fire safety folder where previous signed checklists are kept and where notes are made of any items in disrepair or removed are made.
- Keep these records for at least a year
- Ensure that any reports from staff of unsafe electrical equipment are dealt with before the letting commences.

### Other Recommended Checks on Changeovers (useful for ticklists)

- Ensure heating controls are returned to “normal” settings. Guests frequently turn the heating up, down, or (to be helpful) off, or may have adjusted the timings, or individual radiator thermostats. For the comfort of incoming guests, and for your control of heating costs, these should be checked and adjusted as necessary
- Hairdryers – if you provide these, ensure at each changeover that the guard at the rear is present and has not become dislodged, otherwise hair can be sucked into the fan and cause a nasty accident
- Lightbulbs – check that bulbs are working in bedside and table lamps, as well as in ceiling lights. Guests often don’t say when things aren’t working, and this will save you a call-out during the next guest’s stay

### Legionella Risk

Legionnaires disease is a potentially fatal form of pneumonia which is normally contracted by inhaling small droplets of water (aerosols), suspended in the air, containing the Legionella bacteria. If your property is empty for any length of time (1 week +) then you should take precautions against the risk of Legionella. Standing water presents a risk of Legionella bacteria accumulating, and is particularly high risk in showers, as Legionella bacteria is dispersed in airborne water droplets, so the spray created by a shower is the perfect delivery mechanism. Anyone using a contaminated shower risks breathing in the bacteria and developing Legionnaires’ disease as the bug takes hold in the lungs.

- If your shower has not been used for a week or more, run water from both hot and cold supplies through the shower hose and showerhead for two minutes. To ensure no spray escapes from the showerhead, run it through a bucket of water or full bath.
- If your shower has not been used for two weeks or more, disinfect the showerhead. The showerhead should be removed, and the shower run for two minutes. The showerhead should be disinfected before being re-fitted by immersing for at least an hour in any solution designed for cleaning baby feeding bottles (e.g., Milton). Showerheads should be regularly disinfected about four times a year.
- Raise the temperature to 60°C or higher. Temperatures above 60°C will kill Legionella bacteria so make sure that the temperature of the hot water in your boiler/cylinder is set at a minimum of 60°C. Beware of burns and scalding and take extra care if you have children. Legionella can survive in low temperatures, but thrive at temperatures between 20°C and 45°C.
- If your property has been empty for a while, flush the whole water system for two minutes or more. First flush your toilet, then let the kitchen taps and the hand basin taps run for two minutes or more to let both hot and cold-water pass through. Next, flush the shower through as described above. Finally, let any other taps run for two minutes.