

# How to ensure a safe return to work for you and your employees

# Introduction



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In the 15 years that I have worked in the cleaning industry, I have never experienced a task of comparable magnitude to the one that we are currently witnessing. After weeks of lockdown, businesses are beginning to plot their way back into their offices, manufacturing plants and shop floors but, with a real risk of a second wave of COVID-19 there is, understandably, great concern about the safety of doing so.

One-third of each working day is typically spent in a communal setting. As we improve our understanding of how the virus spreads and how long it lingers on surfaces, it has become clear that a strict and in-depth cleaning routine is now more important than ever.

In the past, the topic of cleaning barely made it into the boardroom. That has undoubtedly changed now. Failing to take cleaning and sanitation seriously will directly influence employee retention, [productivity](#) and, ultimately, business success. No longer will good cleaners be a nice-to-have, they are now a necessity that will prove to employees that their leaders are taking their health and wellbeing seriously.

Weeks of media coverage have brought to the nation's attention just how contaminated our workplaces can be. Desks are often [dirtier than our toilets](#), especially our [computer keyboards](#). If businesses are to return to their premises, it's clear that cleaning routines must be updated as a matter of urgency. Now is the time to make sure you have a professional cleaning partner who is taking this as seriously as you are.

Having been in the industry for 15 years, I know what a good cleaning programme looks like. With this guide I hope to show you why it's so important and I will also offer you some guidance to help you assess whether your cleaning provider is doing their job properly. The standard must now be raised – there is now so much at stake.

**No longer will good cleaners be a nice-to-have, they are now a necessity**



# Why good cleaning is important

The cleaning industry's [£7 billion valuation](#) has not come about as a matter of chance; we all know that it has been an integral part of business operations for as long as we can remember. However, it is about to take its seat at the top table for the first time. Over the course of the year, society is more aware of the true importance of cleaning, leaving businesses and their leaders with little option but to take it seriously.

Failure to do so will impact business performance – something that many can't afford in the present climate. Meanwhile a good, stringent cleaning routine offers a whole host of positive benefits for a business and its people, which highlight the need for employers to renew their focus as they plan their route back to work.

## Workplace engagement

First and foremost, it is important to ensure you are putting the health and wellbeing of your employees first. Employers who are seen to take their cleaning function seriously, particularly in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, will demonstrate a level of care to their employees in a new and more obvious way.

This will lead to a happier, reassured, and more engaged team which, in turn, has a knock-on effect on both retention and productivity. Although there was an increase in the latter [towards the end of 2019](#), the UK still lags considerably behind the [average set by the European Union](#) when it comes to GDP per hour worked, a key measure for productivity, so doing everything to maximise this is crucial to our economic recovery. Even seemingly small changes make all the difference.

## Staff wellbeing

Employees who feel their wellbeing is the primary concern of their employers are more likely to go above and beyond in their work, aiding a boost in productivity. For what it's worth, they are also [52 per cent](#) more likely to enjoy their work, and [45 per cent](#) more likely to feel inspired at work. Meanwhile, on the other hand, employees who are dissatisfied with their employer's level of care are more likely to start looking for employment elsewhere, leading to an immediate downturn in productivity before ultimately leaving the business. In the short term this leaves you with a position to fill; in the long term, it damages your employer brand.

Creating a working environment that both you and your employees can be proud of is only part of the puzzle of employee engagement, but it is a sizeable one. By carefully considering your cleaning approach and ensuring you engage a provider who takes as much pride in your workplace as you do, you begin to establish a culture in which the upkeep of your working environment is front of mind for everyone.

## Operational continuity

As employees begin returning to work, there is still an element of risk involved. We know that COVID-19 is highly contagious, so even as the [R number](#) continues to fall, precautions must remain in place to prevent us from experiencing a [second peak](#).

Maintaining a safe and sanitised workplace will keep your staff healthy, drastically reducing absenteeism at a time when getting sick comes with a minimum two-week period of leave. Reducing the risk involved with returning to work as much as possible will help promote business continuity. Everything happened at break-neck speed when the UK went into lockdown more than six weeks ago, but recovery is undoubtedly going to be a much longer process.

That is why giving your business the best possible chance in doing so is vitally important. Businesses are accustomed to staff taking the odd sick day here and there, but losing a member of staff for as long as two weeks at a time, followed by the knock-on effect of their employees feeling the need to self-isolate after coming into contact with a potentially ill colleague, will damage your operational continuity.

**Reducing the risk with returning to work as much as possible will help promote business continuity**







## Your reputation

By maintaining your operational continuity and improving your workplace engagement, you will cement the reputation of your business to both prospective clients and employees, helping to drive growth and success. Protecting your reputation should be of the utmost importance - in 2019, a study found that as much as [40 per cent of a business' valuation](#) was attributable to its market value. No matter what your marketing spend is or how you advertise your business, people will still do their own research before making the decision to part with their money, and a bad reputation will stick out like a sore thumb.

We have never been in a position where cleaning can impact this in quite the same way as it does now. An increased awareness regarding the cleanliness of our working environments means that a lack of attention in this area could cause some serious damage. If your employees are unhappy with their place of work, or a client pays a visit and leaves unimpressed with the measures you have taken, word will soon get out and people will lose trust in your business.

While it is possible to invest in [reputation management](#), nothing can compare to the visual impact that is made when visiting your work site. Not only will a clean environment impress both clients and employees, but going a step further to physically increase the presence of your cleaning team will have a more subconscious effect - it may be convenient to have your premises cleaned overnight, but your employees will notice the steps you are taking far more if visits are paid throughout the day to decontaminate touchpoints and other high volume areas on top of this.

# Assessing the strength of your cleaning provider

With the importance of a clean and safe work environment now established, the thoughts of business leaders will undoubtedly turn to considering whether their current providers are delivering the optimum level of service.

With cleaning now part of a vital boardroom conversation, it is worth assessing your current provider against the list which follows on this page and the next, to ensure they are set up for success.



## Using the correct products

Whether you supply your cleaning providers with products, or they use their own, it is important that they are suitable for the job. We use specialist chemicals that have the European standard for testing and evaluating viricidal activity in the medical area (EN 14776) which has been approved by Public Health England for the treatment of COVID-19.



## Using the right materials

Use disposable cloths where possible in order to eliminate the spread of the pathogen and other bacteria. Where these can't be used, reusable cloths should be colour coded for use in particular places only.



## Hand sanitising

Entrances and touchpoints, such as door handles, push plates and bannisters, must be accompanied by hand sanitation units to drastically reduce the spread of bacteria on communal surfaces.



## Washrooms

Communal washrooms should always be stocked with antibacterial soap, preferably in contactless dispensers. Swapping air dryers for disposable hand towels will limit the spread of pathogens and bacteria. Most effective, however, is the installation of suitable toilet roll holders in cubicles – those that dispense from the front, rather than underneath, being most hygienic.



## Floors

Doormats help eliminate the entry of bacteria into communal areas, but is your current mat suitable? We recommend having one that is as wide as the entrance point and as long as the door is tall to maximise its effectiveness.



## Hygienic bin disposal

Remove individual bins and replace them with centralised waste points. These can be installed with more hygienic bin bag removal systems. Having to walk to a disposal point discourages employees from eating at their workspaces, reducing the spread of bacteria.



## Enhance your cleaning regime

Does your cleaning provider have enough time to both clean and disinfect surfaces? Some cleaning schedules are kept in place for years and now is the time to make sure they are updated, giving cleaning operators time they need to carry out a proper deep clean.



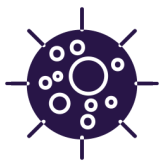
## Working together

Stop looking at cleaning companies as providers, as instead create a partnership that enables them to make a real impact. Welcoming them in as part of the business will allow them to create a relationship with staff, encouraging better hygiene habits such as eating away from their desk.



## Clear signage is key

The presence of clear signage which emphasises the importance of cleanliness is crucial to changing attitudes within the workplaces. While they shouldn't need it, signs to remind employees to properly, and thoroughly, wash their hands, or leave places tidy after use will act as a reminder. It will also show that you, as an employer, are taking it seriously.



## Decontamination

Cleaning is important, but in the current climate you must go one step further to ensure the working environment is free from contamination. Bacteria and viruses are spread quickly and unknowingly so carrying out regular deep cleans is a must. If your cleaning provider does not offer a full decontamination service, now is the time to consider one that does.

# Cleaning up your act

It is often that the smallest details can make the biggest impact. By upping the ante with your cleaning service provider, you will create a working environment that you, your staff and your clients, both existing and prospective, feel comfortable and safe in. As the UK, along with the rest of the world, begins to emerge from the current lockdown, the safety of the workforce is paramount from both a business and humanistic perspective.

Establishing a more thorough cleaning regime will be key to re-establishing a level of trust when it comes to safety and hygiene in communal areas like the workplace. Following weeks of intense public attention, it is inevitable that the trust our employees, and society have in the safety of their working environments will have been shaken.

While maintaining the level of cleanliness is important, that level must first be established. The COVID-19 virus was being transmitted prior to lockdown measures being introduced and so workplaces must be thoroughly decontaminated before reopening their doors, which is a level of service above and beyond the usual cleaning regime.

It is up to business leaders to take the right approach with their cleaning providers if they are to reassure their staff, clients, and customers. Trust has been shaken and it must be re-established – failing to do so is simply not an option.





# Get in touch

We understand the importance of keeping you and your staff safe in a clean, hygienic work environment. If your office, manufacturing plant or other place of work is in need of decontamination, or if you simply want to have a chat about your cleaning needs and service provision, then please get in touch.

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