

## **How to sanitize a playspace in a COVID-19 World**

The information in this article is information we believe to be accurate at the time of publishing this article, but it could have changed by the time you read it. Please check with your local health care provider prior to action for more up to date information.

With the competing priorities of urging people to stay at home to prevent infections vs the mental health costs of spending too much time indoors, mixed with the unclear risks of outdoor transmission have public health officials struggling to craft a clear and consistent message.

As the varying provinces and territories in Canada struggle with when and how to re-open - what we do know is that COVID-19 spreads far more easily indoors than outdoors. So opening playspaces is one of the more reasonable activities for a user to participate in when your jurisdiction begins to re-open public facilities.

Some important points to make up front:

- Surfaces that are frequently touched with hands are most likely to be contaminated. Focus sanitizing efforts on more frequently used surfaces such as: climber rungs, swings seats and chains, handrails and hand supports, etc.
- **It should also be noted that commonly used cleaners and disinfectants are effective against COVID-19. So there is no need to use harsh chemicals**
- Have a cleaning procedure spelled out so all employees are using the same procedure
- Leave social distancing signage up (for the time being) – but take ‘closed’ signage down
- Suggest (via signage) that users should sanitize their hands before and after each use - as well as suggesting to wipe down and sanitize surfaces prior to use

### **Cleaning and Disinfecting**

Choose a product that cleans and disinfects. What is the difference? Cleaning products remove germs, dirt, and impurities from surfaces. Cleaning does not necessarily kill germs, but by removing them, it lowers their numbers and lowers the risk of spreading infection. Disinfecting products kill germs on surfaces using chemicals.

Use only approved hard-surface disinfectants that have a Drug Identification Number (DIN). A DIN is an 8-digit number given by Health Canada that confirms the product is approved and safe for use in Canada.

### **So how can we sanitize outdoor public playgrounds to a reasonable level?**

Read playground manufacturers instruction manual first. The playground owners’ manual and instructions are a great place to start. These should have come with your play equipment upon initial installation and should be the best source of information on how to clean the structures, including which may or may not include detergents and cleaning methods to use or avoid. The owners’ manual can be a treasure trove of information on how to maintain your playground and prolong its longevity. Too often these manuals get lost or overlooked. How to sanitize your play equipment may be one of many tidbits of useful information inside.

Below is a normal course of action for sanitizing and cleaning playground equipment:

- Start by using a power washer on metals and plastics (be sure to start on the lowest / least powerful setting to help ensure no damage to the equipment). PVC coated platforms can also be power washed, albeit you will need to pay special attention to any cracks in the PVC coating to avoid lifting, peeling, or spreading of these areas which can lead to a larger maintenance problem down the road.
- A low pressure sprayer may be more optimal than a power washer.
- The Government of Canada is recommending the following diluted bleach mixture (as being effective against COVID-19): Diluted bleach prepared according to the instructions on the label, OR, in a ratio of:
  - 1 teaspoon (5 mL) per cup (250 mL) or
  - 4 teaspoons (20 mL) per litre (1000 mL)
  - Visit this link for more information: <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/disinfectants/covid-19.html>
- **Harsh chemicals like undiluted bleach or chlorine should never be used to clean playground equipment**
- If you have used any chemicals, leave the play equipment closed for a minimum of 24 hours to allow contaminants and contagions time to dissipate.
- **If you need to use chemicals, ensure they are approved for use.**
- Make sure any staff operating a washer or sprayer is wearing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to avoid contaminated water droplets.
- Wood cannot or should not be power washed as it can become abrasive and the water pressure can cause damage to wood surfaces. On wood, use a brush with warm soapy water. Also use warm soapy water on anything sticky. All playground surfaces can be wiped clean with a disinfecting wipe or brush with warm soapy water – it's just like washing a car!!! **Please note:** a misconception is that you need to use hot water. Water of any temperature is sufficient.
- Degreasers should not be used to clean plastics, bubble panels or any type of window as it can cloud up and inhibit visibility and can permanently damage these materials.
- Wipe down the most commonly used areas such as handrails, climber rungs, etc. with a damp cloth and a mild detergent.
- Soft bristle brushes can be used to get rid of dirt on plastics, get into crevices and to clean ropes.
- Synthetic poured-in-place surfacing: use vacuum or blower as a good cleaning practice but recognize this will likely have no effect on any germs or coronavirus. Do not use a power washer as it can cause damage to the surface. Consult the manufacturer (or owner's manual) about what types of cleaning agents may be used to sanitize the surface.
- Loose fill surfacing such as sand can be cleaned with a sifter and potentially a mild detergent.
- Engineered wood fibres: A mixture of 3 parts water to 1 part liquid laundry detergent has been demonstrated in the past to help remove and/or eliminate surface microbial growth such as nuisance molds and mushroom growth.

Hopefully by working together to keep our playspaces and recreational facilities clean we can help reduce the spread of COVID-19 and/or other communicable diseases. If you have any

questions about this article or how to clean and sanitize your specific playground, other than what is stated above, you should contact your local playground equipment sales representative.

Regards,  
Scott Belair  
CCPI, CPSI, B.Sc.  
Instructor, Canadian Playground Safety Institute  
scott.belair@cpsionline.ca  
416-580-5437

---

*Scott Belair has 20+ years of experience in the playground and play equipment field. Scott is President of Reliable Reporting, a company known for the development of playground auditing software. He is a member of the Canadian Standards Association Z614 technical committee for play equipment and also a member of the American Society for Testing Materials (ASTM). Scott is an instructor for the Canadian Playground Safety Institute and a certified playground inspector in both the U.S. and Canada. Scott's experience ventures from manufacturing and installations earlier in his career - now into promoting an auditing software program, performing safety audits and training courses throughout the U.S., Canada, Europe and Australia.*