

Criteria to Consider When Specifying Furniture for the Workplace During the COVID 19 Pandemic and Beyond

We've put together this series of guidelines, taking valuable lessons learned from our vast experience in the healthcare industry, to provide an essential framework for designers, dealers and end users, for specifying furniture, fabrics and finishes for the workplace during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. Historically, infection control has largely been an issue which has impacted the healthcare industry, but due to COVID-19, it's become an issue affecting all public spaces. Overnight, it seems, our world has changed. Facilities managers, design professionals and dealers are being hit with an influx of information about the virus that often seems to change from day to day. We've established this series of guidelines, with a strong focus on cleaning, to assist these core groups, in making intelligent decisions as to the specification of furniture, fabrics and finishes in order to support infection control efforts within the workplace.

*These guidelines are intended to serve strictly as recommendations.

FURNITURE
Task chairs manufactured with replaceable components are a wise choice as parts can be easily removed, cleaned, disinfected and put back together, or swapped out if damaged or degraded.
Modular guest and lounge chairs, upholstered in non-porous fabrics, with metal frames or bases, provide greater ease of cleanability. When specifying wood, keep in mind, species with a closed grain appearance will be easier to clean.
Guest chairs and lounge seating designed with clean out spaces support infection control because they are easier to clean. Debris, which may consist of pathogens, can be swept out, from the seat to the floor, through an opening at the intersection of the seat and back.
Minimize the number of seams where possible. Avoid upholstered seating with double stitch seams which may function as a trap for pathogens.
Upholster cushion tops on storage files with a non-porous fabric or other hard surface material.
Use hard surface magnetic white boards, which are easy to clean, in lieu of fabric tackboards.
Non-porous materials such as seamless thermoformed vinyl, laminate and solid surface should be considered for casegoods and tables. When specifying wood, keep in mind species with a closed grain appearance will be easier to clean.
Laminate tops should be specified with PVC edge banding rather than with a self edge which may chip/delaminate, making cleaning more difficult.
Drawer pulls, a high touch point, require frequent cleaning which may be difficult depending on the design of the pull. Consider specifying a touch latch mechanism rather than a traditional drawer pull.
Seek flexible solutions which enable social distancing for open plan, conference and meeting rooms applications. For example, training tables with casters that can be quickly and easily reconfigured.
Use full height panels or tabletop stackers, made of non-porous, easy to clean, hard surface materials such as acrylic or other types of plastic, to divide space and increase vertical privacy which will help minimize exposure to others.
Rethink cubicles - workstations with tall panels which divide space are a better option than open benching stations. Clad panels in a smooth surface, non-porous, easy to clean laminate. Cloth fabrics are germ traps.

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FABRICS

Must be durable enough to withstand rigorous cleaning with hospital grade disinfectants, bleach diluted solutions and hand sanitizer.

1. Determine which cleaning product(s) the janitorial staff uses
2. Verify compatibility with the fabric manufacturer.

Many “cloth” type fabrics are porous meaning they can easily trap virus, bacteria, germs. They may exhibit resistance to deep cleaning so these types of fabrics should be avoided.

Be wary of relying solely on fabrics enhanced with anti-microbial, anti-bacterial additives. According to the CDC, there is no compelling evidence to support the claim that antimicrobial additives diminish the risk of contracting virus, bacteria and germs.

Mesh is a viable option as long as it's bleach cleanable

FINISHES

Glass, seamless thermoform vinyl and solid surface materials support infection control because they have smooth non-porous surfaces and are easy to clean and sanitize.

The risk of virus becoming absorbed and inhabiting these types of materials is reduced.

Smooth surfaced laminates work well for horizontal and vertical applications, but avoid textured laminates as pathogens can settle in and around rough surfaces.

Hard surface materials such as polypropylene are a great option for guest and multi-purpose seating.

Avoid heavily grained, textured wood species such as oak in favor of beech, cherry, walnut, maple which feature smooth surfaces.