

# Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Church Furniture

The recent outbreak of the COVID-19 (Corona) virus has created multiple challenges for houses of worship. **The CDC** has suggested that coronavirus may remain viable for hours to days on surfaces made from a variety of materials. Cleaning of visibly dirty surfaces followed by disinfection is a best practice measure for prevention of COVID-19 and other viral respiratory illnesses in households and community settings.”



There have been many inquiries from our customers about what is recommended to be used to disinfect church pews, wood furniture and other surfaces in their church. We understand the desire to use aggressive cleaning agents including bleach-based disinfectants to stop the spread of germs on the church pews and surfaces. Unfortunately, the finishes can be damaged by repeated applications of harsh detergents or disinfectants that contain alcohol or other dry solvents.

According to L. Jeff Bishop, technical advisor for Society of Cleaning and Restoration Technicians (**SCRT**), a nonprofit trade group. “Most consumers are looking for fast, inexpensive and effective ways to clean and disinfect furnishings and fixtures. However, often they are victims of overly simplistic advertising: ‘One spray in the middle of a room disinfects everything!’ This is not credible nor possible.”

## Cleaning recommendations for your church furniture

You have made a significant investment in your church furniture, and we have gathered some recommendations to help you take care of it. These recommendations are published in good faith and for general information purpose only. We are relying on the expertise of the sites we have linked to and do not make any warranties about the completeness, reliability and accuracy of this information.

- Wear disposable gloves when cleaning and disinfecting surfaces. Gloves should be discarded after each cleaning. If reusable gloves are used, those gloves should

be dedicated for cleaning and disinfection of surfaces for COVID-19 and should not be used for other purposes. Clean hands immediately after gloves are removed.

- If surfaces are dirty, they should be cleaned using a detergent or soap and water prior to disinfection.

## Cleaning & Disinfecting Church Pews

### Washing wood pews and other wood surfaces

Identify the type of finish on your wood surface: a hard finish or an oil one.

- Get some boiled linseed oil, available at hardware stores.
- Rub a few drops into a hidden part of the furniture (in case it affects the stain).
- If the oil beads up, you have a hard finish. If the oil gets absorbed, you have an oil finish.

### Cleaning furniture with hard finishes

You may use a common spray cleaner or want to make a mild detergent solution. Prepare a simple mixture of warm water with a mild detergent (any major household brand will do). Mixture: 1 tablespoon of mild detergent for every 3 gallons of water. This method is best to clean off soils and germs, says Bishop. "Furniture that is painted or has multiple coats of finish can be damaged by repeated applications of harsh detergents or disinfectants that contain alcohol or other dry solvents," he notes.

### Cleaning furniture with an oil finish

- Start with three soft, lint-free cloths. If you're using a rag of clothing or an old shirt, make sure buttons and seams are removed so they don't scratch the furniture.
- Dip one cloth in a sudsy, mild soap and water solution. Wring it out thoroughly and use it to scrub the furniture. Then wet the second cloth with water and use it to rinse the soap off the furniture's surface. Finally, dry with the last cloth.
- Continue this cleaning method for the entire wood surface, overlapping the previously washed areas.

#### **CAUTION:**

- Never clean wood furniture with a hose or excessive water. Standing water will cause significant damage to wood furniture.
- Never use a water-based polish or polish containing wax. These will ruin the finish of the wood.

# How To Disinfect Wood Pews and Wooden Church Surfaces

1. Fill a spray bottle with 2 cups water, 1 cup white vinegar and about five drops dish soap. The vinegar disinfects and the dish soap works as an added cleaning element.
2. Spray the solution onto the wood areas and wipe off with a damp cleaning rag. Using a damp rag removes traces of the vinegar and soap. Continue across the wood section until the area is cleaned and disinfected.
3. Wipe the furniture with a dry-cleaning rag to remove any excess moisture. Be sure to dispose of any rags and cleaning materials.

## Cleaning Upholstered Church Pews and Chairs

You can disinfect your wood pews, doorknobs and even light switches, but what about your upholstered pews? It's possible, but don't reach for that can of disinfecting aerosol spray just yet.

Here's the safe way to disinfect your furniture without harming it, according to Bishop.

1. Vacuum. Use your vacuum cleaner on upholstered cushions. Make sure the vacuum has a ULPA or HEPA filter. Vacuuming fabrics with the upholstery and crevice attachments (nothing with harsh bristles) keeps dirt from building up and wearing into furniture over time.
2. Spray. For loose pew cushions, don't take cushions out of their covers to clean them. The covers might shrink in the wash and no longer fit over the cushion. Instead, apply a spray-on, water-based detergent, like an upholstery-cleaning detergent or liquid soap and water. You can also use a homemade disinfectant comprising a 2-to-1 ratio of 60 to 90 percent rubbing — isopropyl — alcohol to water. Check the labels on your upholstery before shopping for a detergent, since each type of fabric can have different recommendations. And test the cleaning solution on a less noticeable spot to make sure it doesn't discolor the fabric.
3. Agitate, wait, then wipe. Rub in the detergent uniformly to avoid spots and uneven drying patterns. Then wait 5 to 10 minutes for the detergent to dissolve into the fabric and suspend the dirt and oils, advises the Bishop of the SCRT. Wipe the residue away from the surface with a clean cloth. Allow the fabric to dry completely to prevent a moist environment where microorganisms can grow. Test in an inconspicuous place to test to make sure the product does not stain.

"These steps not only kill most viruses and bacteria, but also rinse and remove suspended soils from fabrics," says Bishop.

Waggoners is here to help guide you through cleaning and updating your worship spaces. **Contact Us** for more information on our church pew cushions and other worship products and services.

Please check the **CDC.gov** website often for the latest updates and recommendations related to COVID-19. Any action you take upon the information you find on [www.pewcushions.com](http://www.pewcushions.com), is strictly at your own risk. Waggoners will not be liable for any losses and/or damages in connection with the use of this information

If your cushions or upholstery is old and worn, you may want to consider beginning the process of replacement. Newer fabrics and foams have built-in antimicrobial characteristics. **Contact us to discuss your pew cushion and upholstery needs.**

## Metal Care

Many metal surfaces are covered with a nitrocellulose-based clear protective coating. It's important to stress to your maintenance staff and cleaning staff that they are not cleaning the metal, they are cleaning the protective surface on top of the metal.

- Commercial metal cleaners and polishes could potential damage and cause premature break-down of the protective clear coating. Even ammonia-based cleaners, such as Windex, can weaken the protective coating.
- A soft, damp cloth with a mild detergent, such as a liquid soap, is all that is needed to remove stubborn dirt build-up.
- All cleaning motions should be done in the direction of the metal's grain. Even polished stainless steel has a fine grain to the metal. Avoid swirling or crisscross motions that can damage the protective coating.
- To disinfect your metal surfaces, an isopropyl alcohol solution can be used with no ill effect to the clear protective coating. Strong cleaning solutions and harsh chemicals can damage the protective finish.

## How to clean your church door handles

Doorknobs are one of the most highly contacted surfaces in your sanctuary, but may not be cleaned on a regular basis. Wipe down a doorknob and you may be surprised by the amount of dirt that comes off of it. Bacteria aside, the oils on our hands accumulate over time on these small surfaces, attracting even more grime and foreign particles.

For a natural, non-toxic cleaning solution, spray the surface with vinegar and wipe dry with a clean cloth. There are disinfectant wipes that are quick and easy to clean with. Some common brands are Lysol and Clorox wipes. Simply wipe them over the surface of the doorknob and allow it to dry.

Focus on the knobs and handles that get the most action throughout the day.

While you're at it, don't forget other often-overlooked areas as well, like your light switches, remotes, and computer mouse and keyboard.

## Fun Fact

A lesser-known fact is that certain metals, such as brass, actually sterilize themselves after a certain period of time, making them ideal materials for surfaces like doorknobs (It's called the oligodynamic effect). Brass doorknobs disinfect themselves in about eight hours, while stainless steel and aluminum knobs never do. Unvarnished brass doorknobs, therefore, tend to be more sanitary than stainless or aluminum doorknobs.

## Carpet Care

The Carpet and Rug Institute has published a statement with links to the CDC's recommendations related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"The Carpet and Rug Institute recommends following the CDC's cleaning and disinfection recommendations for US households with suspected or confirmed Coronavirus Disease 2019, which can be found on [CDC.gov](https://www.cdc.gov). For soft or porous surfaces, such as carpeted floors, rugs and drapes, the CDC recommends "removing visible contamination if present and cleaning with appropriate cleaners indicated for use on these surfaces. After cleaning, launder items as appropriate in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. If possible, launder items using the warmest appropriate water setting for the items and dry items completely, or use products with the EPA-approved emerging viral pathogens claims (examples at [this link](#)) that are suitable for porous surfaces."

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