

Post-Pandemic Cleaning Standards: Defining and Auditing Hygiene Protocols

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A clear lesson from the pandemic is that hygiene can no longer be judged by cleaning frequency alone. How often a task is performed says little about whether a space is clean. The question has shifted from “Was the task completed?” to “Was the required outcome achieved?”

The shift begins with defining the standard before measuring it. Spaces differ in how they are used, the hygiene risks they pose, and their operational demands, so specifications should reflect actual need rather than a uniform rota. BICSc Outcome Criteria offer a practical framework, setting out what an acceptable result looks like rather than prescribing which tasks to perform. HSE guidance reinforces a risk-based approach, prioritising high-touch surfaces and welfare facilities.

Auditing must generate meaningful evidence, not a tick-box score. Digital audit trails, occupancy figures and sensor data allow cleaning to be targeted at genuine demand, with performance tracked over time. These tools are spreading across high-footfall estates but remain far from universal.

A note of caution: visual cleanliness is reassuring but not the same as hygienic cleanliness. Research by BICSc and the University of Surrey found bacterial contamination on surfaces that looked clean, a reminder that objective measures provide assurance the eye cannot. It also raises fair questions about what to test, how often, and when to intervene.

People remain central. Training, judgement and clear communication turn a specification into consistent delivery; technology supports the team, not the other way round. Post-pandemic cleaning is not about more cleaning, but about better-defined, better-measured and more responsive cleaning.