

8<sup>th</sup> February 2021

## Gerflor providing positive pandemic response.

Never has it been more crucial to keep our hospitals and healthcare environments clean. With the current Coronavirus climate, the importance of healthcare environments is playing a contributory role in fighting off this pandemic. Healthcare floorings with inbuilt cleanability and disinfect-ability qualities are now improving their response to infection control says Nick Egan, Technical Services Manager, Gerflor.

Ensuring that hospitals are clean is a crucial patient safety issue. It might be an obvious statement but it's the simple truth. The importance of the hospital environment in patient care has been widely recognised in infection prevention and control (IPC). Keeping our hospitals and healthcare environments clean is not just an aesthetic, but with the current pandemic has now of course become a huge critical patient safety issue.

Infection prevention has always been at the forefront of health systems safety drivers, impacting patient outcomes and caregiver safety. Seeking to fill the gaps in infection prevention will continue to be critical amid the COVID-19 outbreak. Infection prevention mitigation and safety protocol will continue to advance as we are faced with new viral and bacterial outbreaks. Each individual material in the built environment, such as surfaces and interior finishes, can foster or improve hygienic efforts for staff and patient safety. All buildings become dirty. Floorcoverings require regular cleaning as dirt and contaminants are transferred from outside on the soles of shoes or from other types of rolling road traffic such as wheelchairs or beds. Beyond the dirt we can see there are millions of micro-organisms (bacteria/viruses) that are also present. A disinfection process in addition to regular cleaning will help to safely eliminate these micro-organisms. The type and frequency of disinfection will be determined by several factors: Type of building, type of contamination, type and frequency of traffic and the type of floorcovering. Careful assessment of these factors will help to determine the most appropriate cleaning and/or disinfection protocols.

Our NHS is currently on the battle front fighting a pandemic which has taken more precious lives since our huge losses in World War Two. It's a sobering thought and crystallises our thinking on infection control and the very environment that patients and staff must endure daily.

With Coronavirus sweeping across the UK patients in hospitals as well as the elderly and vulnerable in other healthcare environments may now have compromised immune systems and be much more susceptible to infections. However, this is not exclusive, anyone admitted to a healthcare facility can be at risk of contracting the nosocomial infections which are picked up in hospitals and healthcare facilities if harmful bacteria can proliferate. According to Healthline, about one in ten people admitted to hospital will contract a hospital acquired infection (HAI) and one of the most common wards where HAIs occur is in intensive care, while contaminated areas can also increase the risk of HAIs by almost 10%. It's a sobering thought as the NHS battles to control the current spread of COVID-19.

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Controlling contamination within healthcare buildings is therefore of utmost importance to healthcare providers. The highest possible standards of flooring that helps stop the march of disease and viruses must continually be met, if not exceeded, to ensure that flow and transmission of infections are kept at bay. Resilient vinyl is considered a highly suitable floorcovering for healthcare environments given its durability, aesthetics, easy-maintenance, environmental sustainability, and infection control properties.

Crucially, dedicated healthcare floorings therefore play a vital role in combating the transmission of harmful bacteria to protect from stains, eliminate waxing/polishing and enable safe, hygienic cleaning procedures.

The standards for testing and evaluating cleanability are, as you would imagine, beyond stringent. At Gerflor we assess our vinyl healthcare floorings for cleanability following a method inspired by the EN Standard 15883-5, whereby the flooring is artificially contaminated by a complex soiling agent (defined in EN Standard 14885). Two cleaning processes for surface contaminants are then applied: spraying with detergent and disinfection and steam cleaning and disinfection. Cleanability is assessed by establishing the quantity of residual contamination present on the surface after these cleaning procedures are carried out in comparison with the accepted levels necessary for a product to be deemed 'clean'. However higher levels of cleanability than required by EN 15883-5 are being achieved when applying these test and maintenance processes to some products. To determine the disinfect ability of a flooring we use a method based on the French Standard NF T72-281, whereby products are artificially contaminated by a suspension of microorganisms followed by an airborne disinfection process. Disinfect ability is determined by comparing the number of microorganisms remaining before and after disinfection with the results of a controlled surface. To help arrest the proliferation of bugs like E. coli, P. aeruginosa, C. albicans and S. aureus, the reduction in the number of microorganisms on the floorcovering should comply with the requirements of the NF T72-281 standard for the microorganisms tested.

Cleanability and disinfection ability is fundamentally important as surface and airborne contaminants like coronavirus can remain on a floorcovering even after stringent deep cleaning and disinfection processes have been carried out. 'Clean' flooring products are designed to reduce the bacteria present before and after cleaning and disinfection as part of infection control.

When the coronavirus pandemic happened, Gerflor immediately contacted virologists to analyse coronavirus behaviour on different surfaces and try to understand how coronavirus spreads.

Working in partnership with Virhealth, an independent laboratory, experts in virology, it appears that the durability of viruses on surfaces can vary from a few hours to a few days depending on the type of material. Gerflor surfaces have been tested according to the ISO 21702 standard with incredibly positive results. As a leading supplier of floor and wall surfaces for healthcare or cleanroom applications Gerflor has always worked in partnership with ultra-cleanliness and hygiene specialists.

As not all flooring products are equal when it comes to their cleanability and disinfection ability, why take a risk with unproven products?

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By specifying flooring solutions that are developed to protect from the risk of particulate and airborne contamination and tested for their performance values, achieving healthier healthcare environments is made possible. Surely in this current COVID-19 climate we must utilise all the weapons in our armoury to fight the spread of the pandemic on every front possible...and the correct specification of resilient vinyl flooring that will help is arresting the transmission of diseases and viruses has a big role to play in this battle.

Learn more about Gerflor solutions, ask for a free sample or contact us to speak to a specialist today by calling 03332 412901, emailing [contractuk@gerflor.com](mailto:contractuk@gerflor.com), or visiting [gerflor.co.uk](http://gerflor.co.uk) for the latest innovations

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