

Maintaining Safety in the Era of COVID-19

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Dive businesses and professionals need to update policies and procedures to include infection control and safety for staff and customers.

COVID-19 HAS THROWN A WRENCH in the travel and dive industry, and dive operators and professionals want to ensure their divers are protected when they get back in the water. Taking steps to reduce the transmission of COVID-19 in scuba shops, on boats and through shared equipment will continue to be important for the foreseeable future.

The days of simply rinsing equipment in fresh water and hanging it to dry are gone. Using a disinfectant that is approved for use against the virus that causes COVID-19 is one of the most crucial steps a dive operation can take, especially if providing rental equipment. Operators should disinfect equipment in a separate container of disinfectant solution at the specified concentration and amount of time and then rinse it in fresh water and allow it to dry completely before the next use. Include these new disinfection protocols in your standard operating procedures, and train your staff to routinely and effectively use them.

It is important to choose a disinfectant on the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) List N, because these products are approved

for use against the virus that causes COVID-19. Be sure to look up a product's EPA registration to verify that you can use the product on scuba equipment — search for wording such as “scuba,” “dive equipment” or “respirators” in the list of approved uses for the product. List N disinfectants will also kill many other viruses, bacteria, fungi, algae and other microorganisms that we find in the waters in which we dive.

Disinfection is not limited to your rental equipment. It extends to all surfaces that both staff and clients may contact, such as your shop counter, changing rooms and restrooms. You should also disinfect items in your retail shop that clients handle, such as any masks or wetsuits that a customer tries on.

Disinfection alone will not control potential infection at your business or during your dive operations. You may also want to consider the following essential steps to limit infection:

- Follow personal hygiene practices, including regular hand washing and good respiratory hygiene. For suggestions, see the CDC guidelines at [cdc.gov/flu/professionals/infectioncontrol/resphygiene.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/infectioncontrol/resphygiene.htm).

- Enforce social distancing in the shop, on the boat, in the classroom and even in the water.
- Require personal protection equipment such as gloves and masks for staff and customers, and consider further measures, such as eye protection, that may be necessary for staff.
- Ensure that your operation's policies regarding staff and customers — including screening, exposure and infection risk guidelines — adhere to all local, state and federal recommendations.
- Protect the air intakes that feed nitrox generators.
- Use clean handling for all scuba gear, cylinders and filling whips, especially after disinfection.

You will need to adjust standard operating procedures for almost all activities and maintain discipline to adhere to them. Even as the limits on activities get lifted and restrictive practices are modified or rescinded, you will need to continue your strict disinfection procedures as the training agencies teach and the applicable regulatory authorities mandate.

We are living in a new reality, so we must change our old practices to maintain safety. **AD**