



health

Department:
Health
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

DISINFECTION TUNNELS AND SPRAY BOOTHS IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19 (4 June 2020)

(Statement prepared by the Occupational Health and Safety academic group within the Occupational Health and Safety Workstream – Covid-19 Response)

The Occupational Health and Safety academic group within the Occupational Health and Safety workstream of the National Department of Health (NDOH) – would like to inform the general public, business and other work operations as well as the public service that disinfection tunnels or spraying a person with a disinfectant is NOT recommended as these procedures have not been primarily designed for humans but for industrial operations and as such are deemed ineffective. Furthermore, there is a high likelihood that they may also cause unintended health problems in individuals subjected to such practices.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has made several clear statements against the use of disinfection tunnels in the context of COVID-19:

“Spraying of people with disinfectants (such as in a tunnel, cabinet or chamber) is not recommended under any circumstances”^{1,2}

The use of tunnels or other physical structures (booths, cabinets, gates) with disinfection aspersion or spray devices are not recommended for use on humans. This is based on the following observations:

- Products used in disinfection tunnels and similar structures pose harmful effects to human health, especially to respiratory tract and skin
- Tunnels or other physical structures with disinfection dispersion or spray devices are not effective for inactivating viruses present in the respiratory tract or on the skin
- The use of tunnels or other physical structures with disinfectant dispersion or spray devices can lead to further unintended virus dispersion
- Industrial and medical grade disinfection devices routinely require the use of personal protective gear and strict safety measures by the applicator, which is not currently how these methods are being used for the lay person subjected to these practices
- The use of these structures is likely to induce a false sense of security among those being sprayed leading to non-compliance of the most important general safety precautions of wearing face masks, social distancing and practising personal hygiene

The assertion that disinfectant manufacturers have adjusted their products to be more “person friendly”, does not address the well-known fact that the primary source of virus and its main route of transmission, which is droplet spread, is generated from the upper and lower respiratory system.

South African occupational health and public health experts have been emphatic that the use of disinfection structures should be strongly discouraged.³

The Occupational Health and Safety academic group would like to state that the practice of disinfection structures (*tunnel, cabinet or chamber*) is NOT recommended, and the standard scientifically based measures that are known to be effective should be used viz. hand washing / sanitising, social distancing, cough / sneeze etiquette, surface disinfection and PPE where appropriate.

References

1. WHO. Considerations for the disinfection of environmental surfaces in the context of COVID-19. Interim guidance, draft 22 April 2020
2. WHO. Annex to Considerations in adjusting public health and social measures in the context of COVID-19. 10 May 2020
3. Ministerial Advisory Committee (MAC) on COVID-19. Advisory on disinfection tunnels for preventing SARS-COV2 transmission, 22 May 2020