



Touchless access: Creating safer built environments

- Research finds COVID-19 can remain active on surfaces for 48-72 hours.
- Majority of consumers prefer not to touch door handles.
- Safety should be at the forefront of building management and design.

ASSA ABLOY
Entrance Systems

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Introduction

By the end of October 2020, 44.7 million people had contracted COVID-19 and the global death toll surpassed 1.1 million.¹ As the number of cases continue on an upward trajectory, people are waking up to the idea that this pandemic will be with us for the foreseeable future. The priority now must be to encourage social distancing and adapt our environments to be as safe and secure as possible—while building consumer and worker confidence.

We find ourselves living in a “new normal” where managing the spread of the virus involves constant cleaning and disinfecting. The world doesn’t stop turning and we continue to look for solutions to reduce the risk of contamination as we each get on with our day-to-day lives. Many have become hesitant to go about their routines, even with precautions.

While many of us are able to embrace working from home and online shopping, front-line workers and small business owners still spend much of their time in communal buildings of some form or another. Be it hospitals, doctors’ offices, pharmacies, schools, retail stores or public facilities, these spaces still play a critical role in our society and we have a responsibility to make them as safe and welcoming as possible.

Commercial buildings are a breeding ground for viruses of all types. Whether it is a door handle or stair rails, COVID-19 can remain active on some surfaces for two or three days, posing a major health hazard in communal spaces.² Hand washing is of course essential in controlling the spread, yet those managing buildings can make facilities far more secure and accessible by reducing the number of touch points. Business owners are

looking for ways to make their spaces safer while also visibly signalling that they are putting safeguards at the forefront and remaining welcoming.

One of the most effective ways an increasing number of businesses and facilities professionals are reducing physical contact is through the use of automatic doors. Long since the standard in European and Canadian commercial buildings, the demand for touchless access is surging in the United States and has a critical role to play in combating the spread of the virus and ensuring employees, visitors and customers feel safe within a building.

Automation is a progressively popular tool for infection control that eliminates common touch points—and, for consumers that have an option of not entering such as gas stations, a key to comfort. ASSA ABLOY Entrance Systems is at the forefront of automated access innovation, working with customers around the world to deliver a range of automated entrance, pedestrian and speed door solutions.

ASSA ABLOY Entrance Systems’ portfolio of touchless access solutions not only helps combat the spread of bacteria and germs, but products can also improve traffic flow, security and energy efficiency. As we adapt to the challenges around us, automatic doors will play a key role in making our spaces more hygienic, accessible, efficient and secure.

¹ COVID-19 Dashboard by the Center for Systems Science and Engineering (CSSE) at John Hopkins University, <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html> (accessed Oct. 29, 2020).

² National Institutes of Health, Study suggests new coronavirus may remain on surfaces for days, <https://www.nih.gov/news-events/nih-research-matters/study-suggests-new-coronavirus-may-remain-surfaces-days> (accessed Oct. 29, 2020).

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Infection control

Touch points such as doorways are top of mind as global awareness increases about the spread of infectious diseases. Without automation, doors are a key point of transmission of resilient bacteria and germs. There are millions of bacteria on our fingertips and the more surfaces we touch within a building, the easier they spread.

Research in The New England Journal of Medicine found that SARS-CoV-2 remained viable for up to 48 hours on stainless steel and up to 72 hours on plastic.³ With that in mind, it is easy to understand just how quickly dangerous viruses and bacteria can be transmitted.

A study by The University of Arizona found that more than half of commonly touched surfaces in an office, including doorknobs, can become infected by a single ill person.⁴ The study included about 80 participants, some of whom unknowingly received droplets on their hands containing artificial viruses. Everyone was instructed to go about their normal work day. Researchers found that within four to six hours, more than 50% of surfaces and employees were infected.

³ Neeltje van Doremalen et al., "Aerosol and Surface Stability of SARS-CoV-2 as Compared with SARS-CoV-1," The New England Journal of Medicine, April 16, 2020, <https://www.nejm.org/doi/10.1056/nejmc2004973> (accessed Oct. 29, 2020).

⁴ Alexis Blue, "Germs Spread Fast at Work, Study Finds," The University of Arizona News, January 30, 2013, <https://news.arizona.edu/story/germs-spread-fast-at-work-study-finds> (accessed Oct. 29, 2020).

Survey of consumer sentiment

However stringent a cleaning routine may be, touching doors is a major hazard when trying to prevent the spread of highly transmissible germs. In the midst of the pandemic, people are becoming increasingly wary of the risks posed to their health through touching contaminated surfaces. This factors into customer choice as well as consumer confidence. ASSA ABLOY commissioned a YouGov Omnibus survey to better understand more about the public's concerns.

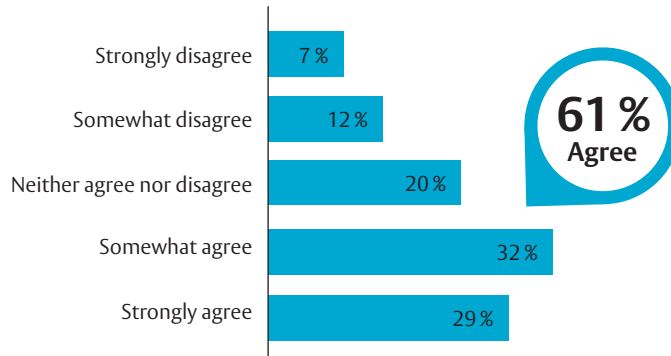
Researchers surveyed more than 1,300 people in the U.S. and asked three key questions about how their behavior may have changed during the COVID-19 pandemic. The responses highlighted their level of concern about infection control:



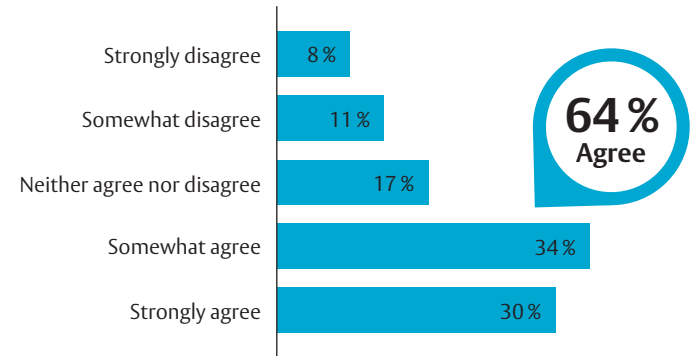


To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

1. I try not to touch surfaces/ touch points in common areas like door handles or manual doors.

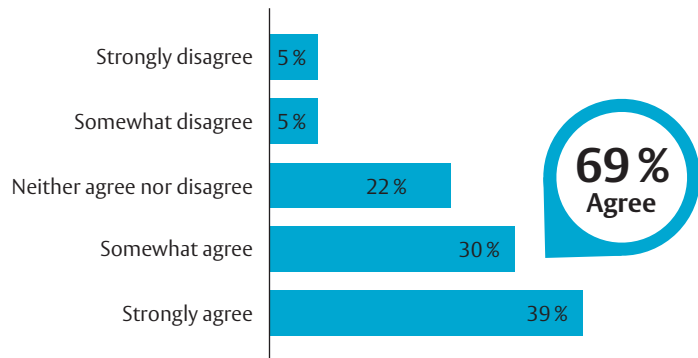


2. I avoid touching public manual doors by opening/closing with my sleeves, a paper towel, or by kicking the door open with my body, etc.

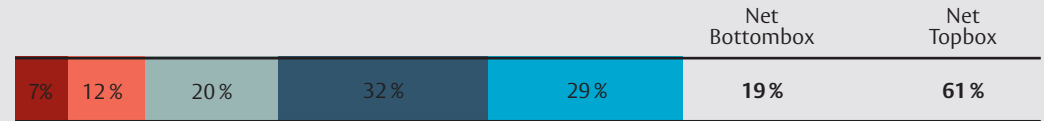


To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

3. I prefer stores, pharmacies, doctors' office, offices, restrooms that use automatic doors to provide a more convenient/touchless experience.



Combined responses



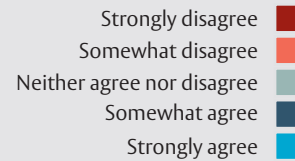
I try not to touch surfaces/ touch points in common areas like door handles or manual doors.



I avoid touching public manual doors by opening/closing with my sleeves, a paper towel, or by kicking the door open with my body, etc.



I prefer stores, pharmacies, doctors' office, offices, restrooms that use automatic doors to provide a more convenient/touchless experience.





Responding to the challenge

As concern over contamination in common spaces rises, the onus is on designers, owners and managers to create buildings and especially facades that incorporate fewer touch points. Only then can we ensure a sizeable reduction in the spread of bacteria and viruses.

Through the installation or retrofitting of automatic entry systems, the threat of contamination within a building is drastically reduced. As well as providing touchless access, automatic entry systems improve traffic flow, eliminate pinch points and allow people to move more freely while adhering to social distancing protocols.

Within the building itself, glass automatic doors allow for separation of spaces and provide greater control of internal environments. When their use is combined with the provision of sanitation points such as regular cleaning and staggered arrival times, buildings will become safer environments and people will feel far more comfortable about using them.

Turning to the experts

ASSA ABLOY Entrance Systems has always been quick to respond to its customers' needs and since the arrival of COVID-19, has worked with building owners and managers on making their spaces more secure. A growing number of people are asking what they can do to remove touch points to minimize contact with germs.

ASSA ABLOY Entrance Systems has a vast portfolio of solutions that limit physical contact while maintaining efficiency and a pleasing aesthetic:

Sliding doors – There is a choice between single or bi-parting openings, through a variety of styles and configurations. Safe and easy to use, they are suitable for any entrance, from simple opening and closing in an entryway, to providing a controlled environment for clean rooms' hermetic seal.

Swing doors – These doors take up minimal space and can be incorporated with touchless wave plates to easily transform existing manual doors. The operators are ideal for both new installations and retrofits.

Revolving doors – An ideal option when climate control is a priority. Available in two-, three- and four-wing models, they guide traffic flow while providing superior separation of indoor and outdoor environments.

ICU doors – Touchless option for use in critical hospital environments.

Specification support and application advice for hands-free solutions – Our architectural team can support you with a range of products and devices designed to eliminate the need to open doors with your hands. Support includes spec development, application guidance, code compliance, BIM drawings and CEU programs.

Between 2013 and 2018, Forbes featured ASSA ABLOY in its annual list of The World's Most Innovative Companies four times.⁵ ASSA ABLOY is committed to new product development and addressing the key challenges of the day. As well as offering building occupiers greater convenience, accessibility and security, its systems are helping to improve hygiene standards and create safer spaces.



⁵ The World's Most Innovative Companies, Forbes, <https://www.forbes.com/innovative-companies/#5735eace1d65>

Maintaining safety standards

Keeping automatic doors and entrance systems running is essential to ensuring access and maintaining hygiene. Therefore, it is important to ensure there is an adequate maintenance and service plan in place with service technicians who are ready to respond.

ASSA ABLOY Entrance Systems' expert technicians can help ensure these systems are performing to the right level, that sensors are on the optimal setting and that the doors can respond to changing requirements. Where necessary, they can fit more suitable sensors which work more effectively, without the need to replace the entire door system.





Conclusion

The harsh reality is that infection control is an issue that is here to stay. Everyone involved in ensuring our built environments are safe and appealing has a responsibility to address these concerns and embrace solutions, such as automated entryways, that reduce touchpoints.

The priority must be to change mindsets and put the safety of staff and customers at the forefront of building management and design. ASSA ABLOY Entrance Systems solutions are designed to reduce the risk of transmission and make people feel more secure when accessing offices, shops, schools, factories or medical facilities.

We can't hide away from the threat of viral infection and have to live with the "new normal." The key is to invest in innovative tools that allow us to continue to work, learn, play and interact.

[Get in contact with our experts today](#)

The ASSA ABLOY Group is the global leader in access solutions. Every day, we help billions of people experience a more open world.

ASSA ABLOY Entrance Systems provides solutions for efficient and safe flow of goods and people. Our offering includes a wide range of automated pedestrian, industrial and residential doors, loading dock equipment, perimeter fencing and services.

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