

Ask the Technical Experts!

One benefit of membership is the technical expertise provided by PRINTING United Alliance. Our technical experts can help you overcome common production issues. In addition, we offer environmental, health, and safety advice; consulting and on-site technical assistance; and technology training.

Q. I've heard that UV light can be used to disinfect office spaces. How could it be used at my printing company?

A. UV-C light (100–280 nanometers) can indeed be used to disinfect germs. It is mostly now used in aviation, hospitality, laboratories, and meat packing facilities. Tall portable lamps would be the best option for you, as disinfecting robots (used by airlines), wands, and ceiling fans with UV lights shining up don't seem practical for your purposes. Disinfecting a space, such as a customer viewing room, will take at least 30 minutes. Areas hidden from the light will obviously not be disinfected. UV-C light is harmful to humans so only protected employees can be in areas when lamps are used.

Q. What's the hype versus the reality of antimicrobial coatings for printed products?

A. It's mostly reality. There are aqueous and UV coatings available (and more coming) that can make a surface unviable for many microbes. There is generally no special application requirement, and the added cost is manageable if you have clients in travel, restaurant, health care, education, and other markets that see the benefit. Antimicrobial products are regulated by the U.S. EPA as pesticides. The active ingredients of coatings currently sold are registered with the EPA as non-public-health products, which restricts printing companies and their clients from making claims beyond product protection. A printing company could say that the special antimicrobial coating protects against damaging microbes that cause odor and product degradation, but not claim that the coating keeps end users safe from disease-causing microbes such as SARS-CoV-2. Testing has apparently shown that specific coatings can almost completely eliminate a range of dangerous bacteria and viruses, but until a coating ingredient gets registered as a public health product—no small task—claims to that effect in the U.S. are worse than hype, they're impermissible. By the way, to our knowledge no COVID-19 transmission has been traced to a printed product.
