

Covid-19: Companies sell unnecessary "deep cleans" with exaggerated claims

By [Natasha Bolognesi](#)

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Last week, after some of their colleagues tested positive for Covid-19, teachers at a Cape Town school refused to return to work until the school had a "deep clean". This type of incident has played itself over and over across the country since the novel coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2, hit our shores.



Many companies are exploiting ignorance and fear and selling Covid-19 cleaning solutions that are unnecessary and expensive. Regular cleaning with household products is sufficient. Photo: Ashraf Hendricks

Professor Francois Venter, an infectious disease doctor at Ezintsha, Wits University, explains: "These so-called 'deep cleans' after a work colleague tests positive are absolutely unnecessary. Regular, normal cleaning of surfaces using standard household products, like water and bleach, are sufficient. If you spend thousands of rands on a 'deep clean' and someone with Covid-19 sneezes or coughs and touches things in the room a short while later, what was the point of it?"

"Do not get distracted by endless angsting about catching it off a surface; it infects the vast majority of us through the air. So distance, masks, outdoors will keep you safe, not strong chemicals," he says.

Even worse than deep cleans are "disinfection tunnels".

"The Department of Health and the Minister of Health have warned against the use of sanitising tunnels," says Momeena

Omarjee of the Law and Enforcement division of the South African Health Products Regulatory Authority (SAHPRA).

And a [recent article](#) in the South African Medical Journal states: “[T]o mitigate the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, a concerning practice of spraying individuals with disinfectant via so-called ‘disinfection tunnels’ has come to light. The Allergy Society of South Africa supports the World Health Organisation in strongly condemning all human spraying, owing to lack of efficacy and potential dangers, especially to patients with coexisting allergic conditions.”



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NanoWorks’s misleading claims

A company that is marketing anti-Covid-19 cleaning products especially hard is NanoWorks, a division of JC Wholesalers. On its website there’s a Covid-19 menu link. Clicking on it brings up various disinfectant products as well as “Sanitizing Tunnels and liquids for protecting people in high traffic areas”.

GroundUp has seen an order sheet for various NanoWorks products and services, for which they are charging many thousands of rands. But its claims are greatly exaggerated and the money could be better spent on standard cleaning services.

Here are some examples of the company’s misleading claims.

It is selling an unproven “electric fogger” that it claims sanitises environments against Covid-19. But the company has failed to provide any compelling evidence that its product works better than standard cleaning.

A video shows this fogger being used to spray food in a supermarket. The spray has a fancy name: Nano Deionized Aqua Solution containing Nanolyte 815.312 Ag T ion+ formulation. The evidence that it is safe to spray this product on fruit and vegetables, and into the environment, is lacking.

Nanolyte 815.312 Ag T ion+ is described as a “multi-purpose 3 in 1 sanitiser and disinfectant containing nano-silver complex to provide longer lasting biocidal surface protection after disinfection”.

The company claims its disinfectant protects against germs, including SARS-CoV-2 for 90 days. “Covid-19 peace of mind: our nanotechnology revolutionize sanitizing and disinfectant world” and “Can’t wait to lose your mask? Conquer Covid-19 with nanotechnology... Sanitizers; Disinfectants; Anti-Bac coatings All our products offers anti-germ, anti-fungal and anti-bacterial solutions that eradicates 99.9999% of all disease causing organisms, for prolonged periods, even permanently!” (language as in the original)

The company also claims: “Our anti-bactrial technology has scientifically been proven to achieve a 99.9999% (complete) kill against 660+ disease causing micro-organisms, with absolutely no side effects or adverse effects on positive bacteria (pro-biotica) or human or animal tissue and health.” (language as in the original)

The company’s website does not display compelling evidence to support its claims, nor does it provide compelling evidence that its products have “absolutely no side effects or adverse effects on positive bacteria (pro-biotica) or human or animal tissue and health”.

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Both *GroundUp* and consumer activist Dr Harris Steinman asked the company for evidence of its claims. The company responded by emailing many documents but on close perusal, these don't change the picture.

As Nanolyte 815.312 Ag T ion+ is marketed to protect against Covid-19, it has to comply with specific regulations. SAHPRA, South African Bureau of Standards and the National Regulator for Compulsory Specifications (NRCS) on 20 May 2020 released a statement titled: "Regulatory Status of Equipment Being Used to Help Prevent Coronavirus (Covid-19)".

Omarjee of SAHPRA says: "The product [Nanolyte 815.312 Ag T ion +] claims use as a hand and surface sanitiser. Therefore the regulation and compliance should be according to the various standards for surface and for human use, i.e. the NRCS standards and compulsory specifications."

NanoWorks indeed holds an NRCS certification, dated 13 December 2011, for the product Eco-Lyte "marketed as Nanolyte 815.312 Ag T ion +". But the NRCS product description is:

sodium chloride disinfectant,
strength 0.26%,
perfume variant – slight chlorine smell.

This is basically a standard household chlorine product. And, critically, as Steinman points out this product is not the "nano-silver complex" that NanoWorks claims in the name, but a sodium chlorite solution – chlorine in other words. "Chlorine is used as a disinfectant but does not last for months on end. It is essentially just another chlorine bleach."

Either "nano-silver complex" has nothing to do with silver and is just the company's misleading name for chlorine or the company is misleading the public and operating in direct conflict of its nine-year-old NRCS certification stipulation: "No modifications shall be made to the disinfectant or detergent-disinfectant formulation itself, its composition and information that shall appear on each container or on a label securely attached to each container as required by the appropriate compulsory specification without prior notification of the NRCS."

Is it really safe?

NanoWorks sent us documentation that claims that Nanolyte 815.312 Ag T ion+ is "safe to use on children, babies and pets". This statement, however, is in direct contradiction to a statement on the company's Safety Data Material Sheet:

"Environmental stability: No specific data is available for this product; however, this product is expected to be readily biodegradable.

Effect of Product on plant and animals: No evidence is currently available on this product's effects on plants or animals.

Effect of product to aquatic life: No evidence is currently available on this product's effects on aquatic life."

If the product does indeed contain silver nano-particles, it's worth noting that the World Health Organisation has [published an analysis](#) that finds inconclusive evidence of the safety or efficacy of such products, at least when used in drinking water.

Dr Jack Meintjes, Occupational Health Officer for Tygerberg Hospital, says, "We know that some metals (including silver, copper, etc.) have antimicrobial action and these are used in a number of surface coatings. I would normally look at the

clinical evidence of a product, and not just claims based on other research (or simple laboratory studies). I have not seen any clinical studies on these and would therefore be hesitant to recommend [these products].”

And what about Covid-19?

We asked for evidence that Nanolyte 815.312 Ag T ion + is specifically effective against Covid-19. Jaco Van der Merwe, general manager at NanoWorks, replied that Hypochlorous acid (HOCl) (formed when chlorine dissolves in water) “has been proven by a USA laboratory to kill the Covid-19 virus within 2 minutes.”

But in fact the test was on a different coronavirus, not SARS-CoV-2. Furthermore, while HOCl may kill microorganisms and pathogens, it is not the formulation referred to in NanoWorks’s nine-year-old NRCS certificate.

Nevertheless, it’s plausible, even probable, that NanoWorks’s product does destroy SARS-CoV-2. But then almost any household cleaning agent does!

We selected NanoWorks as an example because its marketing is especially aggressive and because of a video that circulated on social media promoting its product. But there are other companies making similar claims.

Don’t waste your money or put people who visit your institution at risk with untested methods. Just make sure surfaces are cleaned often using standard cleaning products.

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