

Cleaners, Sanitizers & Disinfectants

Housecleaning may not be the most enjoyable activity in your day, but a few minutes killing germs can go a long way toward keeping your family healthy.

- **Routine cleaning** with detergent or soap and water removes dirt and grime from surfaces (ex: floors, walls, carpet, windows).
- **Sanitizing** removes dirt and small amounts of germs. Some items and surfaces are cleaned to remove dirt then sanitized (ex: bathrooms ([/English/safety-prevention/at-home/Pages/Bathroom-Safety.aspx](#)), counters, toys, dishes, silverware).
- Some items and surfaces require the added step of **disinfecting** after cleaning to kill germs ([/English/health-issues/conditions/prevention/pages/Germ-Prevention-Strategies.aspx](#)) on a surface (ex: changing tables ([/English/safety-prevention/at-home/Pages/Changing-Table-Safety.aspx](#)), sinks, counters, toys).



Use Caution Around Cleaners, Disinfectants & Sanitizers

Although chemical disinfectants and sanitizers are essential to control communicable diseases, they are potentially hazardous to children, particularly if the products are in concentrated form ([/English/safety-prevention/at-home/Pages/Healthy-Children-Radio-AAPCC-and-Poison-Centers-Issue-Warning-about-Concentrated-Packets-of-Laundry-Detergent-Audio.aspx](#)).

- Products must be stored in their original labeled containers and in places inaccessible to children.
- Diluted disinfectants and sanitizers in spray bottles must be labeled and stored out of the reach of children.
- Solutions should not be sprayed when children are nearby to avoid inhalation and exposing skin and eyes.
- Before using any chemical, read the product label and manufacturer's material safety data sheet.

Questions to Consider When Selecting a Disinfectant:

- Is it inactivated by organic matter?
- Is it affected by hard water?
- Does it leave a residue?
- Is it corrosive?
- Is it a skin, eye, or respiratory irritant?
- Is it toxic (by skin absorption, ingestion, or inhalation)?
- What is its effective shelf life after dilution?

About Bleach:

Household bleach (chlorine as sodium hypochlorite) is active against most microorganisms, including bacterial spores and can be used as a disinfectant or sanitizer, depending on its concentration.

Bleach is available at various strengths:

- Household or laundry bleach is a solution of 5.25%, or 52 500 parts per million (ppm), of sodium hypochlorite.
- The “ultra” form is only slightly more concentrated and should be diluted and used in the same fashion as ordinary strength household bleach.
- Higher-strength industrial bleach solutions are not appropriate to use in child care settings.

Household bleach is effective, economical, convenient, and available at grocery stores. It can be corrosive to some metal, rubber, and plastic materials. Bleach solutions gradually lose their strength, so fresh solutions must be prepared daily, and stock solutions must be replaced every few months. Bleach solution should be left on for at least 2 minutes before being wiped off. It can be allowed to dry, because it leaves no residue. Household bleach can be used to sanitize dishes and eating utensils. The concentration of chlorine used in the process is much less than that used for disinfecting other objects.

Cleaners Containing Disinfectants:

By separating out the cleaning and disinfecting processes, you will reduce the amount of disinfectant chemicals used.

- Soiled objects or surfaces will block the effects of a disinfectant or sanitizer. Therefore, proper disinfection or sanitizing of a surface requires that the surface be cleaned (using soap or detergent and a water rinse) before disinfecting or sanitizing.
- Bleach (the sanitizer/disinfectant) and ammonia (the cleaner) should never be mixed, because the mixture produces a poisonous gas.
- Not all items and surfaces require sanitizing or disinfecting. See the Cleaning, Sanitizing, and Disinfecting Frequency Table (https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/accreditation/early-learning/clean_table.pdf) from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) for more information.

Alternative/Less Toxic Homemade Cleaning Products:

Alternative or less toxic cleaners are made from ingredients such as baking soda, liquid soap, and vinegar. Many of the ingredients are inexpensive, so you may save money over time. However they may require more “elbow grease,” which means you may have to scrub harder.

Although the ingredients in homemade cleaners (e.g., baking soda for scrubbing, vinegar for cutting grease) are safer, not all are nontoxic. Treat them as you would any other cleaner, with caution.

Additional Resources:

- Cleaning Baby Clothes (/English/ages-stages/baby/diapers-clothing/Pages/Cleaning-Baby-Clothes.aspx)
- Germ Prevention Strategies (/English/health-issues/conditions/prevention/Pages/Germ-Prevention-Strategies.aspx)
- Household Chores for Adolescents (/English/family-life/family-dynamics/Pages/Household-Chores-for-Adolescents.aspx)
- Poison Prevention (/English/safety-prevention/all-around/Pages/Poison-Prevention.aspx)

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