

Cleaning, Sanitizing, or Disinfecting, Which Should I Do?

Cleaning, sanitizing and disinfecting are important steps to removing dirt and reducing the spread of germs in child care settings. Routine **cleaning** with detergent or soap and water removes dirt and grime from surfaces. Floors, carpets, walls and windows are cleaned. **Sanitizing** removes dirt or filth and small amounts of germs. Bedding, bathrooms, kitchen counters, toys, dishes and eating utensils are cleaned (to remove dirt) then sanitized. But some child care items and surfaces require the added step of **disinfecting** after cleaning to kill the germs on a surface. Diaper changing tables, handwashing sinks, table tops, and some toys should be cleaned and then disinfected.

Using regular household bleach and water solution is an inexpensive, effective and easy way to remove or kill germs found on surfaces in child care. Bleach and water solution may be used in several ways:

- Dipping the object into a sink or pan filled with the bleach and water solution then letting the item air dry.
- Using paper towels soaked in bleach and water solution to wash surfaces, then letting the surface air dry.
- Using pump spray bottles to thoroughly wet a surface, then allowing the surface to air dry.

All containers of bleach/water solution should be clearly labeled with the contents of the container and the date. *Example:* Bleach and Water Solution, March 3, 2008. Remember to keep all containers of cleaning and disinfecting products out of the reach of children.

Household bleach mixed with regular cool tap water is effective, affordable, convenient and readily available. When purchasing household bleach, read the label making certain the bleach is labeled for household use. Household bleach is typically sold in one of two strengths: 5.25% hypochlorite (regular strength bleach) or 6.00% hypochlorite (ultra strength bleach). Either strength of household bleach may be used in child care. The solution of bleach and water is easy to mix and safe when handled properly. Use rubber gloves, safety glasses or splash goggles when mixing bleach and water.



Sanitizing: When using bleach and water for sanitizing eating utensils or toys that are mouthed, a weaker bleach and water solution may be used.



1 teaspoon bleach to 1 quart of cool tap water (4 teaspoons bleach to 1 gallon cool tap water) Dishes, eating utensils, and toys should be submerged in the bleach and water solution for at least 1 minute then allowed to air dry. Food preparation and food service items should not be towel dried.ⁱ

Disinfecting: Use a stronger bleach and water solution on diaper changing tables, handwashing sinks, toilets, heavily soiled toys, and other surfaces that need disinfecting.ⁱⁱ Use the following recipe to mix bleach and water for disinfecting.



¼ cup household bleach in 1 gallon of cool water

OR

1 tablespoon bleach + 1 quart of cool water

Allow the surface to remain wet for 2 minutes then air or towel dry.

A solution of bleach and water loses its strength and is weakened by heat and sunlight. So, mix a fresh bleach and water solution every day. Unused bleach and water solution should be poured down a drain at the end of the day. Do not discard bleach-water solution where other cleaners or chemicals are in use. **Note of Caution:** Do not mix household bleach with other household chemicals such as toilet cleaners, rust removers, acids or products containing ammonia. Mixing these chemicals with bleach will produce toxic and hazardous gases.

Use Caution When Selecting and Using Cleaning, Sanitizing, and Disinfecting Products:

There are thousands of commercial and industrial products available that meet the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) standards for killing germs. Many products are dangerous and potentially toxic to children. Do not allow children to help you or to be in the area while sanitizing or disinfecting items and surfaces. Often these products carry a warning label on the front of the container. Do not use products that carry a **DANGER** or a **DANGER, CORROSIVE** warning label. If you have questions about a product, ask your child care nurse consultant for help. If you choose an EPA registered product, carefully read the label and always follow the manufacturer's exact instructions.

ⁱ Iowa Food Code, Section 4-901.11, p. 112, US Public Health Service, Food and Drug Administration, Iowa Department of Inspections and Appeals, Food and Consumer Safety Bureau. 1997. <http://www.state.ia.us/government/dia/page9.html>

ⁱⁱ American Academy of Pediatrics, Caring for Our Children, National Health and Safety Performance Standards: Guidelines for Out-of-Home Child Care Programs, Second Edition. 141 Northwest Point Blvd., Elk Grove Village, IL 60007-1098. 2002. Pages 417-418. website: <http://nrc.uchsc.edu/CFOC/index.html>