



Sanitizing and Disinfecting: Is There a Difference?



The terms sanitizing and disinfecting are often used interchangeably which can cause confusion when implementing hygienic practices in conjunction with the use of the Environment Rating Scales (ERS). Confusion can lead to cleaning practices that are not effective, resulting in the spread of germs in group care situations. According to the 2011 *Caring for Our Children* (CFOC) 3rd edition standards there is a difference between the purposes for sanitizing and disinfecting surfaces:

- **Sanitizing:** Reducing germs on inanimate surfaces to levels considered safe by public health codes or regulations.
- **Disinfecting:** Destroying or inactivating most germs on any inanimate surface.

In consideration of this new guidance the ERS authors have adjusted the expectations for cleaning practices to incorporate best practices based upon current research. Details on these updates can be found in the ERS Notes for Clarification documents located on the authors' website: [ERS Institute](#). Additional information is also located in the PA Position Statement documents for each scale, located at the [PA Keys website](#).

What Can be used for Sanitizing and Disinfecting?

EPA Registered Commercial Products that include directions for sanitizing and/or disinfecting. **OR**

Bleach/Water Solution

It is no longer possible to provide a generic bleach/water recipe for sanitizing or disinfecting. Use EPA registered bleach and follow the label instructions for mixing and uses. When instructions are not provided use the following link to enter the EPA number of the product: [EPA Product Labeling System](#). This website will provide additional information for mixing your specific bleach product. If you have additional questions please contact the Program Quality Assessment staff on [Zendesk](#).

When using a bleach and water mixture for sanitizing and disinfecting it is important to mix the two liquids appropriately for each type of cleaning. Research has shown that different bleach manufacturers use varying concentrations of sodium hypochlorite in their product. This means that a standard ratio would not apply to all bleach products.

Children are often in out of home child care settings for long portions of their days. Group care settings are ideal places for children to come in contact with germs brought into the settings by those around them, and therefore we must work to reduce the spread of germs appropriately to safeguard their health. This means cleaning surfaces and toys **a lot!** Additionally, it means that children are exposed to the products we use simply by being in the same environment. Best practice supports limiting that exposure, by using only what we need to get the job done.—sanitizing to reduce germs and, and disinfecting to destroy germs as appropriate.



When should you Sanitize and When should you Disinfect?

As per *Caring for Our Children*:

Sanitizing: Appropriate for food contact surface sanitizing (dishes, utensils, cutting boards, high chair trays, tables), toys that children may place in their mouths, and pacifiers.

Disinfecting: Appropriate for use on non-porous surfaces such as diaper change tables, counter tops, door and cabinet handles, toilets, and sinks used for toileting routines including facets, knobs and basins.

Special Note: *Always clean visible debris from the surface prior to sanitizing or disinfecting. If using an EPA registered commercial product a potable rinse with water after sanitizing may be required and all manufacturers directions for both processes must be followed.*