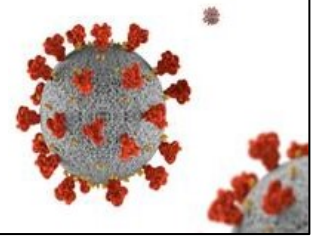


Should I *clean, sanitize or disinfect*? The answer may surprise you!

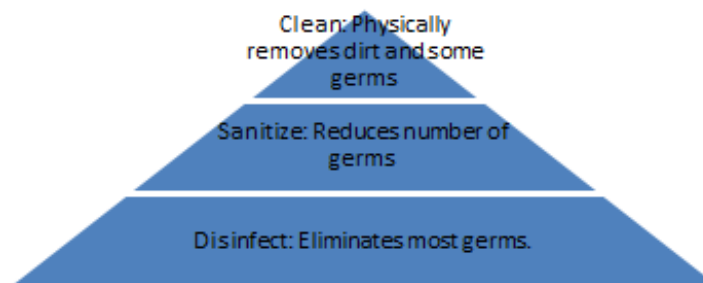
Prevent
the
Spread of
COVID-19



What is the difference?

Most people use all 3 of the terms interchangeably, but there is a significant difference.

- **Cleaning** physically removes dirt and debris, including some germs from surfaces.
- **Sanitizing** uses chemicals to reduce the number of germs to a generally safe level under normal circumstances.
- **Disinfecting** uses chemicals to eliminate most detectable germs and special pathogens.



Many people use sanitizers or disinfectants for general cleaning, but surfaces may need to be cleaned for chemicals to work properly. When using a disinfectant, there is often an identified organism being targeted. A good example is a food service establishment. Cleaning and sanitizing the facility is a daily task. If the facility is identified as a site of a norovirus outbreak, it will be closed to allow for disinfection. Disinfection generally involves a stronger concentration of chemical, a longer surface contact time, or both. Not all products are effective or tested on all organisms. When disinfecting, it is important to read the label to assure the organism you want to destroy is listed on the label. [The EPA has published an on-line list of disinfectants meeting their criteria for use against the virus that causes COVID-19.](#)

Chemicals approved by the EPA for helping control COVID-19 are pesticides!

The COVID 19 virus has increased everyone's interest in using sanitizing and disinfecting products. There are some important things to know about the use of these chemicals: They are pesticides registered with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Some people find it surprising that they are considered a pesticide! They are chemicals that are applied to destroy microorganisms. They need to be used as directed to maximize effectiveness and minimize health hazards.

As true with all pesticides, the label tells the story.

Before using any product, read the label and follow the instructions, including any cautions or hazard warnings. Disinfectants often call for the use of gloves and clothing and eye protection. For example, gloves should always be worn to protect your hands when working with bleach solutions. You can use reusable kitchen cleaning gloves. And make sure to pay attention to contact time. For example, directions for one brand of bleach wipes sold for home use state that the surface needs to be visibly wet for 10 seconds to sanitize; 4 minutes to disinfect.

How and when should I clean, sanitize and disinfect?

There is no documentation that COVID-19 on surfaces is causing the spread.

Studies showing that the virus may survive on a variety of surfaces for hours and even days may make you think you need to clean and disinfect almost everything! **We do know that the disease is primarily spread from person-to-person by respiratory droplets.** Staying at six feet or more away from people is key. From what we know about COVID-19 so far, staying home and social distancing are probably the best things you can do to prevent the spread.

It is still a good idea to clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces often but you don't have to go overboard. Currently, the recommendation for COVID-19 is to clean and disinfect surfaces in household common areas, such as doorknobs, light switches, TV remotes, desks, toilets and sinks once a day.

Cleaning and disinfecting begin with soap and water. For general cleaning and sanitation, soap and water are your best bet. The type of virus that causes COVID-19 is easily destroyed by detergents. Soap works by disintegrating the outer fatty layer of the virus particle.

For household common areas, the cleaning should be followed with a disinfection step. Use chemical disinfection only when necessary. For your health today and in the future, clean and disinfect safely. Use soap and water frequently, and when using household chemicals follow label directions.

What disinfectant should I use?

The list of EPA-registered disinfectants for COVID-19 can seem overwhelming!

There are a variety of products consumers can select from in the marketplace for disinfection purposes. To determine if the product is effective against COVID-19, read the label. If the label states, the product is EPA approved for emerging viral pathogen, it is expected to be effective against COVID-19. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for concentration, application method and contact time.

The right one for you to use is the one that you can get easily and use properly. For most people this is common household bleach.

Directions for Using Bleach to Disinfect for COVID-19

- Add 4 teaspoons bleach to 1 quart (4 cups)
- Use cool water--hot water will deactivate the bleach
- Use unscented, unexpired household bleach (5-6% sodium hypochlorite)
- Never mix bleach with soap, ammonia or other cleaners or chemicals. This can create a toxic gas.
- Label container with contents; mark "keep out of reach of children."
- Mix up a new batch every 24 hours. The chlorine will evaporate over time, making it ineffective.

More is not better!

Using more sanitizers and disinfectant than is needed can be more harmful than helpful. All cleaning and chemical products can present health and environmental concerns.

Are you settling for second best?

The CDC recommendation IS NOT wash and sanitize hands; just wash or sanitize. Proper handwashing will destroy the virus. Hand sanitizer is a back-up when handwashing is not possible.



Lizann Powers Hammond
Food Safety & Nutrition
Extension Associate
Professor
Benton County
powers@wsu.edu