

# SAFETY SPOTLIGHT

## CLEANING, SANITIZING, & DISINFECTING

When it comes to cleanliness, the terms: clean, sanitize, and disinfect are used frequently, and oftentimes interchangeably, but what specifically does each mean? How do they differ from each other and does someone determine in what circumstances to use each one?

### Cleaning

- ❖ Cleaning involves removing visible dirt, debris, oils, and/or dust from a surface. It can also include removing germs (viruses and/or bacteria) from a surface, though it does not necessarily kill them. Cleaning with soap or detergent, water, and friction physically removes germs, along with substances that allow them to survive and reproduce.
- ❖ Cleaning is suitable for areas or objects that do not pose significant risks of passing on infectious agents, as well as porous surfaces such as carpeting, since chemical sanitizers and disinfectants do not work on these surfaces. Always clean dirty surfaces before using a sanitizer or disinfectant, since dirty surfaces reduce the effectiveness.

### Sanitizing

- ❖ Sanitizing means to free something from dirt and germs. It lowers the number of germs on surfaces or objects to a safe level by killing or removing them. Sanitizing uses chemical-based products labeled as sanitizers (such as hand sanitizer). The EPA defines sanitizers as chemical products that can kill at least 99.9% of germs on hard surfaces.
- ❖ Sanitizers are necessary when there is a need to eliminate germs, but it would be excessive or dangerous to use a disinfectant, such as

surfaces used for food preparation or on bare skin.

### Disinfecting

- ❖ Disinfection describes a process that eliminates bacteria using chemicals. It kills virtually all bacteria on hard, non-porous surfaces or objects, though it does not necessarily clean the surface or remove the germs. It is the strongest form of cleaning, as it kills more germs than sanitizing does. The EPA defines disinfectants as chemical products that can kill at least 99.99% of germs on hard, non-porous surfaces or objects. Disinfectants should only be used on high-touch, hard, non-porous surfaces. NEVER use them on hands or bare skin, on surfaces used for food preparation, or objects that go in the mouth.



Before using any cleaning product, fully read the instructions for use and follow all guidelines (appropriate surface type(s), length of application time, simultaneous use with other chemicals, dilution, etc.) Only use EPA Healthy Schools Act listed products approved by your district with proper PPE and in well-ventilated areas.