

What is green cleaning, sanitizing, and disinfecting?



The word *green* is often used to market products and services. There are no government definitions of the word *green*. There aren't laws for how the word can be used. This makes it hard for the consumer.

When we use the phrase *green cleaning, sanitizing, and disinfecting* in this Toolkit, we mean:

1. Cleaning and disinfecting using safer products and tools to avoid harming human health, especially the health of children, staff and the health of the environment.

- It is hard to find safer products because manufacturers of cleaning products don't have to test their products to make sure they are safe for people and the environment. They don't have to list the ingredients they use on the label of a product.
- The easiest way to find safer products is to use products that have been tested and certified by a third party group such as:
 - Green Seal
 - U.S. GREEN-COIL® Certification
 - EPA's Design for the Environment Safer Disinfectants Program (for disinfectants)
 - EPA's Safer Choice (cleaning products)

These organizations look at effects on human health, wildlife, and the environment when they test cleaning products. These organizations have websites where you can find lists of safer products (see Resources).

- No products used to clean, sanitize, or disinfect are completely safe. The best products are safer. Green cleaning means always using safer products and always following the instructions on the label.

- Remember that when you see words like *green*, *all natural*, *organic*, *eco-friendly* and *environmentally friendly* on a cleaning product label, they have no legal meaning. They are usually just a way to get you to buy the product.

2. Only use sanitizers and disinfectants when and where it is necessary. These products contain chemicals that kill germs. They are all hazardous to people and the environment to some degree.

- The only group that tests disinfectants and sanitizers to find those that are safer is the EPA's Design for the Environment Safer Disinfectants Program.

- Disinfectants and sanitizers with the active ingredients *citric acid*, *accelerated hydrogen peroxide*, *isopropyl alcohol*, *sodium hypochlorite* and *lactic acid* have been found to be less hazardous.

- Always clean the surface, then disinfect. Allow a disinfectant to remain visibly wet for the amount of contact time stated on the label. This is how long it takes to kill germs with the product. If you don't keep the surface visibly wet for the entire contact time, you could be breathing something that is resistant to disinfection as well as to antibiotics.

- Remember, disinfecting and sanitizing are temporary. As soon as someone touches a disinfected surface, germs start to grow again.

- Cleaning vigorously with a safer all-purpose cleaner and a microfiber cloth can remove about as many germs as a disinfectant and is much safer for people and the environment.