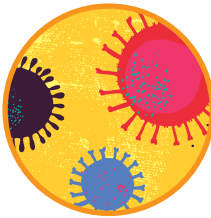


# Safer disinfectant use during the COVID-19 pandemic



The new virus that causes COVID-19 can be transmitted through the air or, less commonly, by touching surfaces that someone has recently sneezed or coughed on and then touching your eyes, nose or mouth.



Washing your hands or using hand sanitizer after touching possibly contaminated surfaces, and keeping your hands away from your face are very important in order to avoid infection from touching surfaces. To prevent airborne exposures, we suggest following [CDC recommendations](#). This fact sheet focuses on cleaning and disinfecting surfaces, in accordance with [CDC guidelines](#), while minimizing the chance of disinfectant health effects.

Using disinfectants on surfaces in your home can kill disease-causing germs (bacteria and viruses), but they may also have health risks. For example, many common disinfectants have chemicals in them that can cause or worsen asthma or harm reproductive health.

## Cleaning: Removing Dirt and Germs

Clean surfaces in your house with an all-purpose cleaner or soap, and a rag, towel or cloth. If available, the best type of cloth to use is microfiber. Wash microfiber after every use in the sink or washing machine. If you fold the microfiber in half and then half again, you will have 8 disinfecting surfaces to use before you need a new one. Wash separately from other cloth types, without fabric softeners. Many germs are removed if you clean and scrub vigorously, which can avoid the need for disinfectants. If disinfection is needed, cleaning first allows the disinfectants to work better. Cleaning products certified by [Green Seal](#) or [Safer Choice](#) are safer for people and the environment.

## Disinfecting: Killing Germs

What to disinfect:

- ◆ Frequently touched surfaces
- ◆ Any surfaces that are touched with unwashed hands after returning from public places. (Better yet, use hand sanitizer on your hands before you come in the house and touch anything!)

*Many disinfectants are not safe for use on food contact surfaces. Look for the words "food-contact sanitizer" on the product label which indicates it is safe for food contact surfaces.*

## Safer, Effective Disinfection Choices

Not all disinfecting products are the same. Many disinfectants may have health risks, especially for children, pregnant women and people with respiratory diseases. There are safer choices!

The EPA Design for the Environment Disinfectants Program has a [list](#) of disinfection products that use active ingredients that are safer for human health and the environment. These active ingredients are: citric acid, hydrogen peroxide, L-lactic acid, ethanol, isopropanol, peroxyacetic acid, sodium bisulfate. Choose products with these active ingredients from the [EPA List N](#) which lists

**EPA** United States Environmental Protection Agency

**List N Tool: COVID-19 Disinfectants** [Feedback](#)

# EPA Registration Number

Active Ingredient

Use Site

Contact Time

Browse All

Keyword Search

All  
1,2-Hexanediol  
Ammonium bicarbonate  
Ammonium carbonate  
Chlorine dioxide  
Citric acid  
Dodecylbenzenesulfonic acid  
Ethanol (Ethyl Alcohol)  
Glutaraldehyde  
Glycolic acid  
Hydrochloric acid  
Hydrogen chloride  
Hydrogen peroxide  
Hypochlorous acid  
Isopropanol (Isopropyl Alcohol)

Show results Clear results

Example from EPA List N

disinfectant products that meet EPA's criteria for use against the virus that causes COVID-19. The [List N](#) tool allows you to filter by active ingredient. Because both lists continue to be updated, checking these sites will get you the most current information.

### To more safely disinfect:

- 1 **Clean the surface** as described above.
- 2 **Disinfect using a disinfectant on EPA's List N** that contains one of the active ingredients approved by the EPA's Design for the Environment Disinfectants Program as safer for people and the environment (see list above).
- 3 **Follow the instructions on the disinfectant label!** One of the most important steps in disinfecting is to make sure you leave the disinfectant **glistening wet** on the surface for the recommended contact time listed on the product label.
- 4 **Make sure the product has an EPA registration number and is not expired.** Always store disinfectants according to label instructions, in a well-ventilated space out of reach of children.



It is better to use a liquid disinfectant and microfiber cloth instead of disinfecting wipes, because wipes are often not wet enough to achieve the necessary contact time.

Remember that a surface is only disinfected until the next person touches it, or coughs or sneezes on it!

#### If you can't access some of these safer products:

If you don't have access to a microfiber cloth: wash or dispose of sponge, rag, or towel after every surface cleaned. If you fold a rag/towel in half and then in half again, you will have 8 disinfecting surfaces to use before you need a new one.

- ◆ Options to clean sponges:
    - ◇ wash in the dishwasher,
    - ◇ soak for one minute in a ½ teaspoon of bleach mixed in one quart of water solution,
    - ◇ for a non-metallic sponge, another option is to microwave soaking wet for one minute.
- Change sponges weekly. Even with cleaning, sponges will still contain bacteria.
- ◆ Towels can be washed with soap or detergent in a basin or washing machine.
  - ◆ If you only have access to bleach or disinfectants with active ingredients other than those listed as safer, make sure you use the personal protective equipment recommended by the manufacturer. Be sure to ventilate the area well (open windows, bring in outside air, turn on fans).

As with any disinfectant, it is also important to follow label instructions, that it remains glistening wet on the surface for the recommended contact time, that the disinfectant has an EPA registration number, is stored safely according to label instructions and is not expired. Bleach has a relatively short shelf-life (less than one year). **Do not combine disinfectants.** It is especially dangerous to combine bleach and ammonia. For more information on safer bleach use, see this [resource](#) from Michigan State University

### Conclusion

Clean routinely; disinfect only when needed. Disinfection should be targeted at high-risk surfaces, using the safest disinfection products available to you.

Disinfecting surfaces alone won't stop transmission! Remember to also follow CDC guidance regarding social distancing and hand-washing.



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**Resources**

CDC [Recommendations for Airborne Exposures](#).

Western States PEHSU, Green Cleaning, Sanitizing, and Disinfecting Toolkit fact sheet: [What's So Great About Microfiber?](#)

Green Seal [Safer Cleaning Products List](#).

EPA [Safer Choice Products List](#)

EPA [Design for the Environment Disinfectants Program](#).

EPA [List of Products for Use Against SARS-CoV-2 \(List N\)](#)

Michigan State University [Resource on Bleach](#).