

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
 - ◇ UL ECOLOGO® 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*, *ecofriendly*, 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 Project.
- ◆ Disinfectants and sanitizers with the active ingredients citric acid, accelerated hydrogen peroxide, isopropanol, ethanol, sodium bisulfate 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 breeding superbugs that are 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 almost as many germs as a disinfectant and is much safer for people and the environment.

3 A really green way to reduce the spread of infectious disease is through our behaviors. No chemicals are needed! We can reduce the risk of getting an infectious disease by:



- ◆ **hand washing.** It is one of the most important ways to reduce the spread of infectious disease. It also reduces exposure to toxic chemicals that collect in dust and get on our hands and into our mouths, especially for young children.



- ◆ **getting vaccinated!** Vaccinations are the only way to prevent many diseases that are spread in the air. Vaccinations also protect other people, especially those who are vulnerable such as infants who aren't old enough to be vaccinated and elderly people, and people getting chemotherapy, who don't have good immune systems.



- ◆ **sneezing into your sleeve.** This keeps germs trapped in fabric where they don't live very long and are less likely to be passed on to other people.

- ◆ **wearing a mask.** During periods of wide community spread of infectious disease, public health officials may recommend that everyone, including children, wear masks. The practice of mask wearing has been shown to significantly reduce the spread of respiratory diseases like COVID-19. Children as young as two can be taught to wear a mask.



- ◆ **not touching the inside of your mouth, nose, and eyes.** The skin that lines these parts of your body is called a mucous membrane. When you touch your mucous membranes with germy hands, the germs can get into your body and make you sick.



- ◆ **staying home when you are sick.**
- ◆ **keeping 3 to 6 feet away from others when you sneeze or cough.**

Resources

[UL ECOLOGO® Certification](#)

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

[EPA Safer Choice](#)

[Green Seal](#)

Dahl, R. "Greenwashing: Do you know what you are buying?" *Environ Health Perspectives*, 2010 June; 118(6): A246–A252.