

Cleaners, Disinfectants and Sanitizers, So What's the Difference?

There is a misunderstanding, as to the differences between **cleaners, sanitizers and disinfectants**. Many falsely believe that they can use one product for all cleaning situations. In fact, each are formulated for specific purposes.

Cleaners

Cleaners work by washing the surface to lift dirt, dust, grime and germs off so they can be rinsed away. They do not kill germs, but just the act of cleaning a surface helps to lower the number of germs which makes it difficult for them to multiply or survive.

Continuous cleaning should be done on a regular schedule to keep the numbers down. Cleaning should also always be done before any attempt to Disinfect or Sanitize a surface.

Sanitizers

Sanitizers reduce the germs on a non-porous surface to a safe level to help decrease the risk of spreading infections.

By definition, a [sanitizer](#) should reduce by 99.999% *bacteria or disease causing organisms* in 30 seconds. They do not have to kill these organisms, though many do, just reduce their numbers. The official definition of sanitizing for food product contact surfaces is a process which reduces the contamination level by 99.999% in 30 sec. Again, Sanitizers are most effective if a surface is physically cleaned first. You cannot effectively sanitize a dirty surface.

Sanitizing is required by regulation in food service areas and in childcare centers.

Disinfectants

Disinfectants are meant to destroy organisms and pathogens (bacteria and viruses) on non-porous surfaces. To be classified as a [disinfectant](#) a product must kill *all organisms* listed on it's label in up to 10 minutes. Disinfecting does not leave a surface clean or remove germs, so cleaning should be done first. Because they are usually much stronger chemicals, disinfectants are not normally used for food preparation surfaces

Not to muddy the waters, some disinfectants, by virtue of their strength, can qualify as a sanitizer when left on a surface for 30 seconds, but are definitely not for use in food preparation areas.

Disinfecting is recommended for use in **high-risk areas** and for **high-risk incidents**