

A Guide to Safe and Effective Cleaning and Disinfecting

Why should we limit our use of disinfectants?

- There is a growing belief on the part of the public that all germs (or “microbes”) need to be killed because of infectious-disease outbreaks mainly in public places. This belief and limited time for routine cleaning and hand hygiene leads to the indiscriminate use of sanitizers, disinfectants, and antimicrobial hand products that may actually pose a hazard to the public.
- Disinfectants are not cleaners but pesticides designed to kill or inactivate microbes. Thus, they are not products that should be used indiscriminately. The overuse and misuse of these products is a growing public health and environmental concern. Overuse of some disinfectant products can potentially create microbes that are resistant to particular disinfectants or that become “superbugs”.
- Bacteria, fungi, and viruses play important positive roles in human health. Microbes have both beneficial uses and negative impacts. Product manufacturers sometimes design media messages about the proliferation of germs and their potential health affects so as to cause public alarm and increase the desire for antimicrobial products.

Why is it necessary to clean before disinfecting?

- When disinfection is necessary, all dirt, debris, and other organic matter should be removed from a surface so that the disinfectant can come into contact with and destroy the microbes.
- Soil renders disinfectants less effective because it can hide the microbes, absorb the disinfectant ingredients, and change the chemical nature of the disinfectant.

Can you clean and disinfect at the same time?

- Although cleaners do not disinfect and disinfectants do not clean, there are products that are designed and registered by the EPA to clean and disinfect.
- They contain both a disinfectant and a detergent cleaning agent. All heavily soiled surfaces need to be cleaned first using a separate cleaning agent.
- EPA: United States Environmental Protection Agency, <http://www.epa.gov/>