

Parent Aware Tip Sheets

Cleaning and Sanitizing

Why should we clean and sanitize?

- To promote a safe and healthy environment with limited exposure to germs, illness and contaminants
- Children look to adults to model the behaviors needed for healthy living

What is the difference between cleaning and sanitizing?

Cleaning is the physical act of removing soil on surfaces or equipment. When caregivers wash tabletops or toys with soap and water they are cleaning the surfaces.

Sanitizing removes germs from surfaces or materials. A sanitary surface must be cleaned and then sanitized. Bleach and water solutions are commonly used for sanitizing because they are inexpensive and easy to mix and use. Sanitizing solutions rely on “dwell time” to be effective. This means that they may need to air dry to be effective or remain on the surface for a specific amount of time before the residue is removed. Note the dwell time requirements for the solutions used. Some soft surfaces, such as dress-up clothes or plush toys can be sanitized using heat, usually through machine washing and drying. Dishes and other equipment may also be sanitized using the heat of a dishwasher or sanitizer.

What needs to be cleaned and sanitized?

- Toys, equipment, surfaces, and materials in environments where children play need to be cleaned and sanitized regularly.

What are some tips for making cleaning and sanitizing more efficient?

- **Develop a written schedule.** Although cleaning is a habit that comes naturally for many caregivers, it is important to create and adhere to a schedule to ensure that cleaning tasks are accomplished. The schedule that follows is recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics.
- **Designate a space for soiled toys.** Place a plastic bin or bucket near play areas. Label the bin “to be washed” or something similar. When children are done using toys that have been in their mouths or in contact with other body fluids, place the toys in the bin until they can be cleaned and sanitized.
- **Clean as you go.** Take advantage of moments throughout the day to address cleaning and sanitizing tasks. This makes the cleaning tasks more manageable and models good habits for the children. Clean as you go tasks might include:
 - Wiping up spills or sweeping floors that have visible soil to prevent slips and falls.
 - Putting toys away as they are used; encouraging children to participate in clean up according to their abilities.
 - Emptying garbage cans as they become full, replacing liners.
 - Cleaning and sanitizing tables, chairs, high chairs, and other multiple use surfaces as they are used. Never spray bleach on a table where a child is still sitting.
 - Taking advantage of moments when children are sleeping for midday clean up – sweeping and mopping floors, cleaning lunch dishes, replacing consumable items, etc.

What are some tips on working with cleaning solutions?

- **Mix bleach-water solutions carefully each day.** To be effective, bleach and water solutions must be of appropriate strength and must be mixed fresh each day. Mix using the following concentration: one-fourth cup bleach to 1 gallon of water. Use cool water, not hot; hot water makes the bleach ineffective against germs.
- If you are mixing smaller amounts, use proportionally less bleach. If you are using a solution other than bleach and water, be sure your licensing agent has approved the solution and *always* mix the solution according to the manufacturer's directions.
- **Label and carefully store cleaning and sanitizing solutions** out of the reach of children.

Sample Cleaning Schedule: (The schedule that follows is recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics)

AREA	CLEAN	SANITIZE	FREQUENCY
Classrooms/Child Care/Food			
Countertops/tabletops, floors, door and cabinet handles	X	X	Daily and when soiled.
Food preparation and service surfaces	X	X	Before and after contact with food activity; between preparation of raw and cooked foods.
Carpets and large area rugs	X		Vacuum daily when children are not present. Clean carpets only when children will not be present until the carpet is dry. Clean carpets at least monthly in infant areas, at least every three months in other areas and when soiled.
Small rugs	X		Shake outdoors or vacuum daily. Launder weekly.
Utensils, surfaces and toys that go into the mouth or have been in contact with saliva or other body fluids.	X	X	After each child's use, or use disposable, one-time utensils or toys.
Toys that are not contaminated with body fluids. Dress-up clothes, sheets and pillowcases, individual cloth towels (if used), combs and hairbrushes, wash cloths and machine-washable cloth toys. (None of these items should be shared among children.)	X		Weekly and when visibly soiled.
Blankets, sleeping bags, cubbies	X		Monthly and when soiled.
Cribs and crib mattresses	X		Weekly, before use by a different child, and whenever soiled or wet.
Phone receivers	X	X	Weekly.
Toilet and Diapering Areas			
Hand washing sinks, faucets, surrounding counters, soap dispensers, door knobs	X	X	Daily and when soiled.
Toilet seats, toilet bowls, toilet handles, door knobs or cubicle handles, floors	X	X	Daily, or immediately if visibly soiled.
Changing tables, potty chairs (Use of potty chairs in child care/early education is discouraged because of high risk of contamination.)	X	X	After each child's use.
General Facility			
Mops and cleaning rags	X	X	Before and after a day of use, wash mops and rags in detergent and water, rinse in water, immerse in sanitizing solution, and wring as dry as possible. After cleaning and sanitizing, hang mops and rags to dry.
Waste and diaper containers	X		Daily.
Any surface contaminated with body fluids: saliva, mucus, vomit, urine, stool or blood	X	X	Immediately, using universal precautions.