Sanitizing and Disinfecting: Is There a Difference?

The terms sanitizing and disinfecting are often used interchangeably which can cause confusion when implementing hygienic practices. Confusion can lead to cleaning practices that are not effective, resulting in the spread of germs in group care situations. According to the 2011 Caring for Our Children (CFOC) 3rd edition standards there is a difference between the purposes for sanitizing and disinfecting surfaces:

- **Sanitizing:** Reducing germs on inanimate surfaces to levels considered safe by public health codes or regulations.
- **Disinfecting:** Destroying or inactivating most germs on any inanimate surface.

To carry out sanitizing and disinfecting routines correctly, all visible soil must be removed from the surface to be cleaned, which allows the solution to make direct contact with the surface. Most importantly read the label of the product! When using commercial products be sure to follow all the directions on the product to assure that sanitizing/disinfecting occurs appropriately. Many commercial products have different directions for each process, or are meant just for sanitizing or disinfecting, not both.

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When Sanitizing and When Disinfecting?

Sanitizing: Appropriate for food contact surface sanitizing (dishes, utensils, cutting boards, high chair trays, tables), toys that children may place in their mouths, and pacifiers.

Disinfecting: Appropriate for use on non-porous surfaces such as diaper change tables, counter tops, door and cabinet handles, toilets, and sinks used for toileting routines including facets, knobs and basins.

**Special Note:** Always clean visible debris from the surface prior to sanitizing or disinfecting. If using an EPA registered commercial product a potable rinse with water after sanitizing may be required and all manufacturers directions for both processes must be followed.