

Search EPA.gov

Coronavirus

CONTACT US <<https://epa.gov/coronavirus/forms/contact-us-about-coronavirus-covid-19>>

What's the difference between products that disinfect, sanitize, and clean surfaces?

At EPA, products used to kill viruses and bacteria on surfaces are registered as antimicrobial pesticides. Sanitizers and disinfectants are two types of antimicrobial pesticides.

Action	What does it do?	Does EPA regulate the product?
Cleaning	Cleaning removes dirt and organic matter from surfaces using soap or detergents.	EPA regulates cleaning products only if they sanitize or disinfect. Learn more about EPA's role. < https://epa.gov/pesticide-registration/determining-if-cleaning-product-pesticide-under-fifra >

Action	What does it do?	Does EPA regulate the product?
Sanitizing	Sanitizing kills bacteria on surfaces using chemicals. It is not intended to kill viruses.	Yes, EPA registers products that sanitize.
Disinfecting	Disinfecting kills viruses and bacteria on surfaces using chemicals.	Yes, EPA registers products that disinfect. To find disinfectants for use against SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19), see List N < https://epa.gov/listn >.
Using hand sanitizer	Using hand sanitizer kills pathogens on skin.	No, hand sanitizers are regulated by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) ↗ < https://www.fda.gov/drugs/coronavirus-covid-19-drugs/hand-sanitizers-covid-19 >.

Surface disinfectant products are subject to more rigorous EPA testing requirements and must clear a higher bar for effectiveness than surface sanitizing products. Many products are registered with EPA as both sanitizers and disinfectants because they've been tested using both methods.

List N: Disinfectants for use Against SARS-CoV-2

View List N, a searchable and sortable list of products for use against SARS-CoV-2, the novel human coronavirus that causes COVID-19. <<https://epa.gov/listn>>

EPA-registered sanitizers and disinfectants may also contain cleaning agents. Learn more about claims that fall under EPA's regulatory authority. <<https://epa.gov/pesticide-registration/determining-if-cleaning-product-pesticide-under-fifra>>

When using EPA-registered products, always follow the label directions. Pay close attention to the contact time, which is how long the surface must remain wet. To learn more about using products safely and effectively, see: EPA's Best Practices During the COVID-19 Pandemic. <<https://epa.gov/coronavirus/cleaning-and-disinfecting-best-practices-during-covid-19-pandemic>>

To learn more about when to clean and when to disinfect against COVID-19, see the CDC's website [🔗](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html) <<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html>>.

Return to Frequent Questions about Disinfectants and Coronavirus (COVID-19). <<https://epa.gov/coronavirus/frequent-questions-about-disinfectants-and-coronavirus-covid-19>>

Related Questions

- What is the process for EPA approval of disinfectant products related to COVID-19? <<https://epa.gov/coronavirus/what-process-epa-approval-disinfectant-products-related-covid-19>>
- Are there any changes to the registration of disinfectants due to COVID-19? <<https://epa.gov/coronavirus/are-there-any-changes-registration-disinfectants-due-covid-19>>
- Do I need to register disinfectant products with EPA in order to import them? <<https://epa.gov/coronavirus/do-i-need-register-disinfectant-products-epa-order-import-them>>
- Does EPA regulate companies that require cleaning services claiming to disinfect for SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19)? <<https://epa.gov/coronavirus/does-epa-regulate-companies-require-cleaning-services-claiming-disinfect-sars-cov-2>>
- Will EPA take enforcement action against companies making false claims that their disinfectants work against SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19)? <<https://epa.gov/coronavirus/will-epa-take-enforcement-action-against-companies-making-false-claims-their>>
- What is an emerging viral pathogen claim? <<https://epa.gov/coronavirus/what-emerging-viral-pathogen-claim>>
- Why aren't hand sanitizers listed on List N? <<https://epa.gov/coronavirus/why-arent-hand-sanitizers-listed-list-n>>

[Coronavirus Home <https://epa.gov/coronavirus>](https://epa.gov/coronavirus)

[Disinfectants <https://epa.gov/coronavirus/disinfectant-use-and-coronavirus-covid-19>](https://epa.gov/coronavirus/disinfectant-use-and-coronavirus-covid-19)

[Indoor Air <https://epa.gov/coronavirus/indoor-air-and-coronavirus-covid-19>](https://epa.gov/coronavirus/indoor-air-and-coronavirus-covid-19)

[Drinking Water and Wastewater <https://epa.gov/coronavirus/coronavirus-and-drinking-water-and-wastewater>](https://epa.gov/coronavirus/coronavirus-and-drinking-water-and-wastewater)

[Frequent Questions <https://epa.gov/coronavirus/frequent-questions-related-coronavirus-covid-19>](https://epa.gov/coronavirus/frequent-questions-related-coronavirus-covid-19)

[Contact Us <https://epa.gov/coronavirus/forms/contact-us-about-coronavirus-covid-19>](https://epa.gov/coronavirus/forms/contact-us-about-coronavirus-covid-19) to ask a question, provide feedback, or report a problem.

LAST UPDATED ON JULY 5, 2022



Discover.

Accessibility <<https://epa.gov/accessibility>>

Budget & Performance <<https://epa.gov/planandbudget>>

Contracting <<https://epa.gov/contracts>>

EPA www Web Snapshot <<https://epa.gov/utilities/wwwepagov-snapshots>>

Grants <<https://epa.gov/grants>>

No FEAR Act Data <<https://epa.gov/ocr/whistleblower-protections-epa-and-how-they-relate-non-disclosure-agreements-signed-epa>>

Plain Writing <<https://epa.gov/web-policies-and-procedures/plain-writing>>

Privacy <<https://epa.gov/privacy>>

Privacy and Security Notice <<https://epa.gov/privacy/privacy-and-security-notice>>

Connect.

Data.gov  <<https://www.data.gov/>>

Inspector General <<https://epa.gov/office-inspector-general/about-epas-office-inspector-general>>

Jobs <<https://epa.gov/careers>>

Newsroom <<https://epa.gov/newsroom>>

Open Government <<https://epa.gov/data>>

Regulations.gov  <<https://www.regulations.gov/>>

Subscribe <<https://epa.gov/newsroom/email-subscriptions-epa-news-releases>>

USA.gov  <<https://www.usa.gov/>>

White House  <<https://www.whitehouse.gov/>>

Ask.

Contact EPA <<https://epa.gov/home/forms/contact-epa>>

EPA Disclaimers <<https://epa.gov/web-policies-and-procedures/epa-disclaimers>>

Hotlines <<https://epa.gov/aboutepa/epa-hotlines>>

FOIA Requests <<https://epa.gov/foia>>

Frequent Questions <<https://epa.gov/home/frequent-questions-specific-epa-programstopics>>

Follow.

