A clean, orderly environment is very important to the health, safety, and emotional well-being of children and their caregivers. Reducing the number of germs on equipment and materials that children and caregivers come into contact with naturally reduces the spread of disease. **Toys that children put into their mouths, crib rails, shelving and table tops, food preparation areas, and diapering areas are the most likely surfaces to become contaminated.**

Routine cleaning with soap and water is a useful method of reducing germs in a child care setting; however, disinfection is also essential in most cases. Household bleach is the most common disinfectant. (Make sure the bleach you choose is household, not industrial.) It is inexpensive and easy to get. The necessary solution of bleach and water is easy to mix, nontoxic, safe if handled properly, and kills most infectious agents.

**Proper Cleaning and Disinfecting**

To disinfect toys or equipment, begin by washing them with soap and water then rinsing with clean, clear water. After cleaning, apply the appropriate bleach solution. A sanitizer must be in contact with the germs long enough to kill them, so allow at least 2 minutes of contact. Since chlorine evaporates and leaves no residue, surfaces may be left to air dry. See the following chart for commonly used recipes. (Of course, if your licensing or regulatory agency provides you with a recipe, that is the one that you should use.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Strong Bleach Solution</strong></th>
<th><strong>Mild Bleach Solution</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>¼ cup of bleach to 1 gallon of water</td>
<td>1 tablespoon of bleach to 1 gallon of water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or 1 tablespoon of bleach to 1 quart of water</td>
<td>or 1 teaspoon of bleach to 1 quart of water</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Use to Disinfect these Items:**

All surfaces except play materials:
- tabletops and counters
- bathroom and diapering area
- door frames and knobs
- mops, brooms, dustpans used to wipe up bodily spills

**Use to Disinfect these Items:**

All play materials and objects that children have put into their mouths
After you have mixed your sanitizing solutions, label the containers “Strong Bleach Solution” and “Mild Bleach Solution,” as appropriate. Keep in mind that bleach solutions break down quickly, losing strength and the ability to kill germs. Make fresh solutions each day and store in a cool dry location away from direct sunlight and out of the reach of children. It is also important to know that bleach solutions are ineffective if organic matter remains on the surface.

**Schedule for Cleaning and Disinfecting**

Toys and equipment used by children under three years of age should be washed and sanitized with a bleach solution at least daily. Toys for older children should be washed and sanitized as needed, but at least weekly. Remember that surfaces that have been contaminated with any kind of bodily fluid should get immediate and thorough attention.