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Disinfectants: What Your Cleaning Company Needs to Know

By [Steve Hanson](#) ★

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As a cleaning service one of the things you will be responsible for is to make sure that you are killing germs and other microorganisms. Germs, disease causing bacteria and viruses can hide in all kinds of nooks and crevices in your buildings - everywhere from toilet seats to doorknobs. And these tiny creatures are not content to stay in one place for long. They catch rides on hands, garbage cans, and cleaning equipment and are then spread throughout the building. Knowing how disinfectants work will help you to choose a suitable disinfectant to control the microorganisms that lurk in your buildings.

So how do disinfectants work? They work by oxidizing the germs, breaking down their cell walls, in other words, disrupting the physical makeup or blocking the energy-yielding or synthetic process of the germs. Because different ingredients or combinations of ingredients kill different germs, you need to select a disinfectant that works on the specific germs you are trying to remove. If that is not possible, you should select a broad-spectrum product that works on all the germs that you might face.

There are several types of disinfectants available, but the two categories of disinfectants that a cleaning company needs to know about are:

*Quaternary disinfectants. This type of disinfectant carries a positive charge. The bacteria, viruses and fungi you are trying to remove carry a negative charge. When you clean a surface using a quaternary disinfectant, the cells of the bacteria, viruses and fungi change from a

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negative to positive charge, which eventually leads to its death.

Quaternary, also referred to as Quats, are typically used in low-level sanitization situations. Quaternary disinfectants are odorless, non-staining and non-corrosive to metals. They are fairly non-toxic if used in diluted concentrations.

*Phenolic disinfectants. Phenol and phenolics are the active ingredients in most bottles of common household disinfectants. Phenol is the oldest disinfectant and was originally called carbolic acid. Phenol can be corrosive to skin, so you may want to consider using disinfectants that contain phenolic, which is less corrosive.

Phenolics are very effective at sanitization and disinfection. They are also effective at destroying several types of bacteria, including the bacteria that causes tuberculosis. Phenolics are fairly expensive to use and they react with some plastic surfaces. To make sure you are using the right disinfectant and that it is performing as it should pay attention to the following factors:

*Concentration. Mix the disinfectant to the proper dilution rate.

*Contact time. Some disinfectants need to be in contact with the germs they are trying to kill for specific amount of time. If not left long enough they cannot do their job.

*pH. Certain disinfectants work best under an acidic condition (bleach), while others work best under alkaline conditions (quats).

*Temperature. As with pH, bleach works best in cold water and quats work best with warm water.

There are a growing number of products on the market that are specifically designed to limit the spread of germs or effectively remove them from the surfaces people tend to come in contact with. How can you tell what germs a product is intended to kill? Carefully read the product's label or product fact sheet and look for an EPA number. Commercially sold disinfectants must register their effectiveness claims with the EPA.

As disinfectants are intended to "kill" germs and other microorganisms it is important to follow label directions and plan how often to disinfectant surfaces. A disinfectant must be in contact with the germs it is intended to kill. This means you must first clean the surface so it is free of dirt, grease and oil. Then apply the disinfectant let it dwell for the recommended amount of time.

Remember, even though good cleaning removes dirt and many germs, the germs left behind will grow and spread. Using a disinfectant will help to kill the remaining bacteria, viruses and other microorganisms. This will help keep your building clean and its occupants healthy.

Steve Hanson is co-founding member of The Janitorial Store (TM), an online community for owners and managers of cleaning companies who want to build a more profitable and successful cleaning business. Sign up for Trash Talk: Tip of the Week at <http://www.TheJanitorialStore.com> and receive a Free Gift! Read cleaning success stories from owners of cleaning companies at <http://www.cleaning-success.com/>.



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