



How do I clean and disinfect toys?

As Monica stared at the aftermath of Jack's 1st birthday party, she wondered what to use to clean up the mess. During the party she saw Kevin wipe his runny nose all over Jack's toy car. Kevin had quite the cough and sore throat. And what about Melanie, who wiped her cake-covered face all over T-Rexie, Jack's favorite stuffed animal. While looking through the kitchen cupboards, she found bleach, an industrial strength sanitizer and antiseptic hand gel. She thought surely one of these products would do the trick.

Yet Monica was uneasy with the idea of using harsh cleaning agents on toys. She pictured Jack with T-Rexie's tail in his mouth. Without knowing who to turn to for this type of information, Monica decided to dial the phone number on her sanitizer. She called the National Pesticide Information Center (NPIC).

[Click here](#) to read what Monica learned from [NPIC](#) about using antimicrobial products to clean her son's toys ...



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Monica was surprised to learn that sterilizers, disinfectants and sanitizers are regulated by the [U.S. EPA](#) as [pesticides](#). Just as herbicides control weeds, and insecticides control insects, [antimicrobials](#) control germs including bacteria, viruses and fungi.

Monica also learned what makes sterilizers, disinfectants and sanitizers different. Sterilizers are most commonly used on medical or laboratory equipment to destroy bacteria, viruses, fungi and the spores they produce. While disinfectants do not destroy spores, they do destroy infectious bacteria and fungi. Sanitizers reduce the number of germs on an object to a level that meets public health standards.

The specialist said that hand gels are meant to be used on people and are not appropriate for use on toys. Monica then asked if soap and water or household bleach would do the trick. The specialist explained that products claiming to *clean only* lack [pesticidal claims](#), and are not registered by the EPA. Because they are not registered, it's not known whether or not they kill or remove germs. Monica learned that the [EPA registration number](#), found on the label, lets people know that the product was evaluated for potential health risks and effectiveness. Monica found an EPA registration number on the label of her bleach container and shared it with the specialist.

While reviewing information on the bleach label, Monica asked the specialist what, “for use on hard non-porous surfaces,” means. The specialist explained that this term is often used to describe solid materials that do not absorb light or liquids. Monica noted that T-Rexie was definitely absorbent and decided the washing machine was most appropriate for him. However, the toy car was a hard non-porous surface. Since Kevin had played with it while he was sick, Monica decided to use a solution of bleach to disinfectant it. Monica determined the dilution rate by reading the application and mixing instructions section of the label. The specialist pointed out that the toy must remain in the solution for at least 2 minutes to be disinfected.

In the end, Monica learned some new things and made an informed decision. She also understood the importance of [reading the product label](#) before using any pesticide.

The National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education has a [great resource](#) for selecting and using an appropriate sanitizer.

