



Fact sheet

Disinfection using bleach

While the use of EPA-registered disinfectants is the preferred option for disinfecting surfaces, these materials are not always readily available. Household chlorine bleach is often used as a substitute because of its availability and its germ-killing properties, including H1N1 novel influenza virus.

Household bleach is toxic and highly corrosive. A typical bottle of bleach contains about 5 to 6 percent sodium hypochloride and has a pH of 11.4. Exposure may cause severe irritation or damage to eyes and skin. Breathing the vapors may also irritate the throat and lungs.

To disinfect surfaces using bleach, add one-quarter to one-half cup of bleach to a gallon of water, use a cloth to apply the solution to the surface and let it stand for three to five minutes before rinsing with clean water. It is also recommended individuals take the following precautions when preparing any bleach-based disinfection solutions.

1. Wear rubber or nitrile gloves and follow label precautions.
2. If splashing may occur, protect eyes, face and clothing.
3. Transfer liquid in a sink.
4. Use a funnel when transferring solution to small-diameter bottles. (If none is available, cut the top off another plastic bottle.) Replace any leaking or damaged bottles.
5. Add bleach to water, not water to bleach.
6. Tighten caps securely and test the caps over the sink before leaving the area.
7. Clean the outside of the bottle before use.
8. Rinse reusable gloves or dispose of them.
9. Wash hands after direct contact with bleach.
10. Label bottle(s).
11. Dispose of unused solution in the sink with running water.

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