

Common Cleaning Terms Defined



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The following are the definitions for popular cleaning terms as defined by Services Systems, Inc., a commercial cleaning company located in Culver City, California.

Antibacterial

A substance able to kill or slow the growth of bacteria. Antibacterial formulas are not effective against viruses.

Cleaning

The process of locating, identifying, containing, removing and properly disposing of unwanted substances from a surface or area. Cleaning usually involves soap or a cleaning formula and requires some form of agitation, such as hand rubbing or a sponge. **Cleaning removes — but does not kill — microorganisms.**

Decontamination

The reduction or removal of microorganisms or dangerous substances, including biohazardous material and infectious viruses, by physical means, such as cleaning and disinfecting and/or sterilization, or using chemical neutralization methods.

Deep Cleaning

The term has no standard definition. However, cleaning companies often use the term to mean specific services or actions, such as disinfecting using an electrostatic sprayer or chemical; they may also use it to refer to more intense cleaning, such as “deep cleaning” a carpet.

Disinfect

To kill 99.999 percent of the pathogens the disinfectant’s label says it is effective in killing. Disinfectants kill viruses, but only those listed on the label. Cleaning should proceed all disinfecting, and all disinfectants must remain on the surface for the full recommended dwell time.

Dwell Time

The time a disinfectant must remain in contact with a surface for it to disinfect. Some disinfectants have a dwell time of one minute or less; most have a dwell time of four to 10 minutes.

Sanitize

To reduce (not kill) microorganisms by 99.9 percent — the level deemed safe for humans by the Environmental Protection Agency — in 30 seconds or less (99.999 percent in 30 seconds or less in food service settings). Sanitizers cannot kill viruses or fungi and should be used against the specific pathogen(s) stated on the label. Recently, many entities also refer to “sanitizing” as using a disinfectant but not allowing it the full dwell time needed to disinfect.

A lot of news outlets and cleaning companies have been misusing definitions pertaining to cleaning practices lately. For more on why that's a problem, click [here](#).