Sanitizing and disinfecting are two of the main ways to help reduce the spread of germs in a child care setting. The simplest way to sanitize or disinfect is to either spray objects with a diluted solution of bleach and water, or to dip objects into a bleach-water solution and allow them to air dry. For many years, the child care field used a standard recommendation for diluting bleach in water.

In early 2013, manufacturers of household bleach changed the concentration of bleach sold in stores. The bleach solutions now sold have a higher concentration of sodium hypochlorite (8.25%) than the formerly available bleaches (which had concentrations between 5.25% and 6%). The lower-concentration bleaches are no longer being manufactured, and soon will not be available in stores.

Because the new bleaches are more concentrated, the recommendations for diluting them have had to change as well. The instructions for creating a bleach-water solution for disinfecting in the child care setting now depend on the specific bleach used.

Here are the latest recommendations for bleach use in child care:

- Use bleach products that have been registered with the EPA whenever possible. Check the product label for an EPA registration number. If the product has a number, it is EPA-registered.

- If the bleach product is EPA-registered, go to the EPA’s Pesticide Product Label System website (http://iaspub.epa.gov/apex/pesticides/fl?p=PPLS:1) and enter the EPA registration number into the “EPA Registration Number” field of the online form. You should get a list of dates the EPA approved the product.

- Click on the link next to the most recent EPA approval date. This link will open a pdf file of the manufacturer’s instructions. Scroll down to find a chart with instructions for using the product to sanitize or disinfect.

- Follow the instructions on that chart when preparing bleach solution for use in child care.

- If you buy a new brand of bleach, remember to check the new brand using these instructions. The specific recommendations for diluting the bleach may be different.
Sanitizing or Disinfecting?
Bleach manufacturers include two kinds of instructions for bleach use: sanitizing and disinfecting. Although these terms are sometimes used interchangeably, they mean different things.

- **Sanitizing reduces germs** to levels considered safe, but does not eliminate them. Sanitizing is safer for food contact surfaces (such as silverware and high chair trays), and for toys and pacifiers that children may place in their mouths.
- **Disinfecting eliminates or inactivates germs**. Disinfecting requires a stronger concentration of bleach to kill the germs. Surfaces that should be disinfected include diaper changing tables, potty chairs, toilets, countertops, sinks, floors, drinking fountains, cabinet handles, and doorknobs.

Before you mix up a bleach solution, be sure you are using the correct instructions. Sanitizing solutions use less bleach than disinfecting solutions. The manufacturer’s instructions will tell you the appropriate amount to use.

**Tip:** Once you have looked up your brand of bleach, post signs with the appropriate concentrations of bleach and water for sanitizing and for disinfecting near sinks and cleaning areas. Consider taping instructions to the bleach bottle as well.

Bleaches without an EPA Registration Number
Child care programs that are using bleaches without an EPA registration number on the label should contact the **state or local health department** for information on how to safely use that particular bleach for disinfecting in a child care program.

**Safety First!**
These instructions are more complicated than the old generic recommendation for diluting bleach, but they are designed to keep children as safe as possible when using the newer, more concentrated bleaches on the market today.
Keep bleach solutions out of children's reach. Always store bleach and other toxic chemicals in their original containers in a locked cabinet or closet when not in use.

For More Information
To learn more about locating the EPA registration number and manufacturer’s instructions, check out the bleach use guidelines at the National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education at http://cfoc.nrckids.org/Bleach/Bleach.cfm.