

ECERS-3 Cleaning/Sanitizing of Tables Used for Meals

ECERS-3: The Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale Third Edition (ECERS-3) is a program quality assessment instrument designed for use by preschool and child care programs. The ECERS-3 is being used as a quality measure for the Preschool Program Review (P2R) process.

ECERS-3 Requirement: ECERS-3 item # 8 (Meals/Snacks) requires that all tables used for eating meals and snacks are cleaned and then sanitized (a 2-step process).

ECERS-3 TABLE WASHING PROCEDURE – A 2-Step Process¹

1. To remove gross soil, spray the table (or highchair tray) with a soap-water solution and wipe dry with a disposable paper towel.
2. To sanitize the eating surface, spray the **ENTIRE** table/tray with bleach-water solution and wait at least 2 minutes before wiping with a disposable towel or allow to air dry, in order to allow the solution to kill germs. The surface cannot be sprayed and immediately wiped.

See below for additional guidance.

NOTE: The entire table surface must be covered with sanitizer (e.g., glistening wet).

Additional precautions

- Sponges should not be used for sanitizing tables because they soak bacteria away from the surface of the sponge, which then cannot be easily reached in the interior of the sponge by the sanitizing agent.
- If wet cloths are used, a **separate** cloth is required for **each** table/tray, and cloths cannot be returned to soak in a bleach-water solution.
- Food should not be put directly on the table or highchair tray because eating surfaces are more likely to be contaminated than disposable plates or washed and sanitized dishes
- If highchair trays are used as eating surfaces, the trays should be washed and sanitized in the same way as plates and other food service utensils.
- In case different children rotate through snack, each place must be cleaned and sanitized between use by different children. Sanitizing solution should not be sprayed while children are seated at the table.

See page 2 of this handout for recent Author Clarifications.

See also the handout, *Selecting an Appropriate Sanitizer or Disinfectant (Appendix J of Caring for Our Children)*. Download at <http://cfoc.nrckids.org/WebFiles/AppedicesUpload/AppendixJ.pdf>.

¹ From *Table Washing Handout rev 2-11* (downloaded from <http://www.ersi.info/PDF/Table%20washing%20handout%20revised%202-11.pdf>)

ECERS-R Author Clarifications²

ECERS-R authors, July 2011: *An alternative EPA approved “sanitizer” may be used in place of the usual bleach and water solution as part of the table washing procedure or for high chair trays, and other food related surfaces. Check the label of the original container and look for the designation as an EPA sanitizer. Be sure all instructions for use are followed such as the time required to be on the surface or whether to rinse after use. If not do not give credit for cleaning the surface. Safety issues regarding the use of the alternative sanitizer, such as not rinsing the residue if required or not keeping out of the reach of children, should be considered in the supervision-related indicators of this item if applicable, and in the Safety and General supervision items where applicable.*

ECERS-R Author Clarification April 2012: *In order to clarify the different but related functions of cleaning, sanitizing and disinfecting to remove germs, “Caring for Our Children³” states that **cleaning** means physically removing dirt and contamination using soap, water and applying friction, thus exposing any remaining germs on the dry, clean surface. **Sanitizing** means reducing germs on an inanimate surface or object to a safe level. **Disinfecting** means destroying germs on an inanimate surface or object. A sanitizer should be used on food contact surfaces or any object that is mouthed. A disinfectant should be used only on diaper changing tables, toilets, counter tops, door and cabinet handles. Only EPA approved products are acceptable (must have an EPA #), and all sanitizers and disinfectants must be used according to the instructions on the container in order to be safe.*

ECERS-R Author Clarification June 2013: *“Caring for our Children” has issued a new recommendation for use of a diluted bleach solution for sanitizing and disinfecting because many brand name companies have changed their bleach solution and there is no longer a consistent solution across different brands. The new recommendation advises us to: use only EPA registered products for sanitizing and disinfecting; follow the manufacturer's instructions for diluting the bleach solution and for the required contact time.*

Frequently Asked Questions with KY RTC Answers

Question: Do teachers have to sanitize tables in the cafeteria if custodians have already cleaned/sanitized the tables?

Answer: The answer depends on two things: 1) whether or not the custodian used appropriate cleaning/sanitizing materials and procedures (as defined by ECERS-3) and 2) whether or not the tables are likely to be recontaminated between the time the custodian cleans/sanitizes the tables and when children sit at the tables to eat.

Question: Our cafeteria staff uses a dual cleaner/disinfectant to clean the cafeteria tables. Can we use the same product?

Answer: The instructions for most dual purpose clean/disinfectants require leaving the solution on the surface for a long period of time (e.g., 2-10 minutes) and/or for rinsing the table with clean water after using the solution, resulting in a process that is more time-consuming and cumbersome than to wash with soap/water and then sanitize with bleach water solution. Per the Author's Clarification, you must follow the product instructions. See the handout, **Selecting an Appropriate Sanitizer or Disinfectant for more information.**

<http://cfoc.nrckids.org/WebFiles/AppedicesUpload/AppendixJ.pdf>.

² Clarifications for ECERS-R are also applicable for ECERS-3. Author's published ECERS-R clarifications are available from http://ersi.info/PDF/NotesforClarification/ECERS-R_Additional_Notes_1-14.pdf.

³ *Caring for Our Children: National Health and Safety Performance Standards; Guidelines for Early Care and Education Programs*, 3rd Edition. This book serves as the source of many ECERS-3 health and safety requirements. Available online at <http://nrckids.org/CFOC3/>.