

Navigating the Landscape to Select the Right Surface Sanitizer



James Bingham, MS, Senior Research Microbiologist, GOJO

NAVIGATING THE LANDSCAPE TO SELECT THE RIGHT SURFACE SANITIZER

Food safety. It's top of mind for all restaurant owners, but with numerous components of a strong food safety program to consider – hand hygiene, food preparation and food handling, to name a few – it can be difficult for restaurant owners and operators to focus on all areas at all times. As such, it is important to build a simple, solid and effective food safety program.

In this white paper, we look at one facet of food safety, surface sanitizing and cleaning in a foodservice establishment. With so many products available on the market today, it can be difficult to find the product that best fits the requirements of the Food Code, the needs of your restaurant's workers and guests and kills common foodborne pathogens like Norovirus. We will navigate this ever-changing landscape, and provide you with a list of questions to consider, as well as discuss the importance of surface sanitizing and cleaning.

WHY WE SANITIZE AND CLEAN

According to the FDA Food Code, contaminated equipment, such as cutting boards and food preparation surfaces, is one of the five major risk factors that contributes to foodborne illness. The Food Code goes on to state in detail the requirements to sanitize and clean equipment and food contact surfaces in food establishments.¹

Yet, the Food Code does not mandate that a specific sanitizer or cleaner be used; so this can be confusing as to which types of sanitizers and cleaners restaurants should be using. Instead, it becomes sort of a guessing game for restaurant owners, operators and managers. Why? Not all of the products available on the market today are created equal. So how do you ensure you have the right products for your restaurant?

SELECTING THE RIGHT PRODUCTS

There are numerous factors that should be considered when selecting the best surface sanitizing option for your restaurant. The following details the importance of efficacy, safety and sustainability.

EFFICACY

A surface sanitizer needs to effectively kill germs that can cause illness, especially those pathogens that are prevalent in the foodservice market, like Norovirus, Listeria, Salmonella and E. coli. This is why it is important to understand the power of the active ingredient in the sanitizer you are using and to make sure the product is designed to kill specific pathogens.

Understanding product dwell times is especially important. There are numerous products on the market today, and all have varying dwell times, or the time the surface is required to be wet with the product to kill illness-causing pathogens. In fact, some products have varying sanitization times for different bacteria and viruses, and there are even different times for non-food contact and food contact surfaces. In a fast-paced restaurant environment, a product with a shorter dwell can improve productivity. The following are some questions to consider:

- Does the product kill pathogens prevalent in foodborne illness outbreaks, such as norovirus, Listeria, Salmonella and E. coli?
- How quickly does this product kill these pathogens?
- Will the surface remain wet long enough to meet the required kill times? Or, will you need to re-wet the surface in order to achieve the required kill times?
- Can the product help to eliminate the need for separate sanitization products to be used throughout the restaurant? For example, is the product effective on both hard and soft surfaces?
- Is the product easy to use? Does it need to be diluted? Will my staff be able to quickly use the product and understand how to use it?



PRODUCT SAFETY

It is important to select a surface sanitizer that is effective, but it is also critical to select one that is food contact safe. This means the product is approved for use on surfaces where consumable food products are placed and stored, including food preparation counters, equipment and containers. Another factor to consider is to choose a product your employees are comfortable using, which could help to encourage higher compliance through more frequent use.

One other area of safety to consider is whether or not the product you are using gives off any harsh fumes that may irritate both employees and guests. You want to be sure you are using a product that quickly and easily eliminates illness-causing germs to reduce the risk of a foodborne illness outbreak, not a product that has harsh fumes that can irritate the eyes, noses and throats of both employees and guests. When looking for a surface sanitizer for your restaurant, take into account the following:

- Are there any precautionary statements on the product label – like “must wash hands after use,” or “hazards to humans and domestic animals?”
- Is the product approved for use on food contact surfaces, no rinse required? Or, does the product label require food contact surfaces to be rinsed with potable water after using the product?
- Does the product contain harsh chemical fumes that might irritate employees and guests?
- Is the product compatible with the surfaces and equipment you plan to use it on?

SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability is another factor that distinguishes your surface sanitizers and cleaners. Oftentimes, it is thought that a product that is good for the environment may be either ineffective or not strong enough to kill all of the germs in a foodservice environment. That is simply no longer the case. Today, new formulation technologies have been developed with both the environment and superior efficacy in mind.

When you look at a sanitizing product, look to see if it has EPA Design for the Environment (DfE) certification. This certification demonstrates the ingredients in this product are at the green end of the spectrum for its class, as determined by the EPA.

There are numerous options out there when it comes to surface sanitizers and cleaners. Take the time to ask the key questions outlined in this piece, and you will walk away with the peace of mind that you have selected the right product that is worry-free for both your employees and guests.



When considering a surface sanitizer, be sure it has the following characteristics:

- Designed for food contact surfaces**
- No rinse required**
- Kills Norovirus, Salmonella, Listeria, E. Coli and other common germs**
- Rapid kill time**
- Sustainable**
- Effective on both hard and soft surfaces**
- Availability of a device/mechanism to test the level of active ingredient in the product**
- Fragrance free/no harsh fumes**
- No precautionary or warning statements**
- Easy to use**

REFERENCES

- FDA U.S. Public Health Service. Food Code. 2013. Retrieved November 23, 2016, from:
<http://www.fda.gov/downloads/Food/GuidanceRegulation/RetailFoodProtection/FoodCode/UCM374510.pdf>

MEET THE AUTHOR



James Bingham, MS, Senior Research Microbiologist, GOJO

James Bingham is a senior research microbiologist with GOJO. He currently leads a team developing new antimicrobial hand hygiene and surface technologies and researching the transmission of pathogens in healthcare and foodservice settings. He has performed research in areas including *Clostridium difficile* spore biology, antimicrobial mechanisms of action, and patient hand hygiene. He holds a master's degree in food microbiology from North Carolina State University and an undergraduate degree in food science from Cornell University.