

Eco-Hot Tip: Green Cleaning

Chemicals used in many common cleaning products can be toxic to the health of children.



Health Concerns for Children

A wide variety of toxic chemicals are routinely used as ingredients for cleaning products. These household chemicals can make indoor air unhealthy to breathe, irritate the skin and eyes, harm the respiratory tract and endocrine system, and pollute the natural environment. Children are especially vulnerable to toxic chemicals because their bodies and organs are still developing. Children are exposed to toxic chemicals through inhalation, skin and eye contact, and ingestion.

Please note that for the purposes of this eco-hot tip, we're discussing: *cleaning*. Routine cleaning with detergent and water is the most useful method for removing germs from surfaces in the child care setting.

Cleaners are not sanitizers, nor disinfectants. Be sure that you are familiar with the differences between these terms, and always choose the products you need to do the job that you need them to do.

A *sanitizer* is a product that reduces germs on inanimate surfaces to levels considered safe by public health codes or regulations. A sanitizer may be appropriate to use on food contact surfaces, toys that children may place in their mouths, and pacifiers.

A *disinfectant* is a product that destroys or inactivates most germs on non-porous surfaces. A disinfectant may be appropriate to use on diaper changing tables, counter tops, door and cabinet handles, and toilets and other bathroom surfaces.

Green Cleaning Products

Safer cleaning products are available. They are less toxic, environmentally safe, and often cost the same as conventional cleaners.

Not sure which cleaning products are really less toxic? Green Seal, and UL (formerly Eco Logo) are non-profit companies that research and certify cleaning products that are biodegradable and less toxic to human and the environment. Additionally, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has created the Safer Choice label. This label verifies that EPA has thoroughly reviewed the products' ingredients. EPA also has Safer Choice Fragrance-Free, a label for products without fragrance. Visit [Safer Choice](#), [Green Seal](#) and [EcoLogo](#) to verify whether the cleaning products you currently use are safe and healthy.

Reduce Exposure to Chemicals Found in Cleaners and in Other Household Chemicals

1. Keep aerosol spray away! Aerosol sprays, such as carpet cleaners, furniture polish, air fresheners, deodorants, and hair sprays spew invisible droplets of chemicals into the air. The invisible droplets are inhaled by children and can trigger asthma and allergic responses.
2. Stay away from fragranced products! Many synthetic chemicals in fragrances are derived from petrochemicals and can be harmful to human health. Chemicals found in synthetic fragrances include phthalates, which are endocrine disruptors, and benzene derivatives, aldehydes, and toluene, which are known carcinogens.
3. To deal with unwanted odors keep areas well ventilated, place trash in a sealed container and remove it frequently. An opened box of baking soda, kept out of children's reach, replaced every 3-4 months, may help as well.

Household Chemicals Resources

- [EPA Safer Choice](#)
- [UL, formerly EcoLogo](#)
- [Green Seal](#)
- [Green Cleaning Toolkit](#)

For more information on cleaning, sanitizing and disinfecting best practices, please review the National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education's "[Caring for Our Children: National Health and Safety Performance Standards; Guidelines for Early Care and Education Programs](#)", 3rd Edition (CFOC3). [Our Children: National Health and Safety Performance Standards; Guidelines for Early Care and Education Programs](#)", 3rd Edition (CFOC3).