

Cleaning for Home Health

Why “Green” Cleaning?

“Green” cleaning (cleaning your home with less-toxic products and substances) is important because it better protects your health and your children’s health. Many common household cleaning products contain chemicals that can have adverse health effects. These chemicals can cause cancer, irritate the lungs, interfere with the functioning of the liver and other organs, irritate the skin, or affect the reproductive system. Studies indicate that most Americans have common household cleaning chemicals in their blood and urine.

Asthma and traditional cleaning chemicals.

Many common cleaning products can increase your risk of asthma, or they can cause people with asthma to have an episode. According to the National Center for Environmental Health, part of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 20.3 million people had asthma in 2003¹. Asthma is the most common and expensive chronic illness in the US, estimated to have cost \$14 billion in lost productivity and medical costs in 2002².

How common is asthma in children?

Current statistics show that 7.9 percent of children in the US have asthma.³ It is the third-leading cause for hospitalization for children under the age of 15⁴ and the most common cause of school absenteeism.⁵

Children are especially susceptible to the potential harm presented by cleaning chemicals. A child’s developing body is less capable of metabolizing and excreting the toxins contained in traditional cleaning chemicals—which increases the risks to their central nervous system, reproductive organs, immune system, and lungs.

Less-toxic products will help keep your home clean and safe. They can even work better than more-toxic traditional cleaning products.

What Can You Do?

Be a label reader. Begin by reading the labels of the products you use regularly. Manufacturers are not required to list ingredients on their products. However, if a product has clear labels that read “Danger,” “Warning,” or

“Caution,” you may not be using the safest product on the market. Warning labels do not identify products that contain chemicals that may cause asthma or trigger asthma episodes or cause reproductive harm. Research the ingredients in the products you use at the National Institutes of Health Household Products Database ([http://hpd.nlm.nih.gov/.](http://hpd.nlm.nih.gov/))

Avoid the following:

- Products packaged in aerosol containers
- Products with added fragrances
- Products containing disinfectants

(unless specifically used for disinfecting)



Avoid products that contain:

- Alkyl phenol ethoxylates – environmental toxins
- Ammonium quaternary compounds – occupational asthmagens
- Glycol ethers – developmental and reproductive toxins
- Phthalates – hormone disruptors/asthmagens found in fragrances
- Monoethanolamine – occupational asthmagen

Shop for products that fully disclose all ingredients and that are:

- Plant-or bio-based, not petroleum-based
- Biodegradable
- pH neutral
- Packaged in pump-spray bottles, not aerosol cans
- Packaged in recyclable containers
- Certified by a third-party certification organization (Green Seal, EcoLogo) or carry the Design for the Environment logo

The Plain Facts

For additional information see:

- INFORM Fact Sheets - Cleaning for School Health - Asthmagens in Institutional Cleaning Products at <http://www.informinc.org/astind.pdf>
- Environmental Working Group at: <http://www.ewg.org/healthyhometips/greencleaning>
- Household Hazards – Women’s Voices for the Earth at: <http://www.womensvoices.org/our-work/safe-cleaning-products/learn-more/>
- National Institutes of Health, Household Products Database at: <http://hpd.nlm.nih.gov/>
- The Good Guide at: <http://www.goodguide.com/>

Or contact Carol Westinghouse, Cleaning For Health Program Manager at 802.626.8643 or westies@ecoisp.com.

Third-party Certification Seals and Design for the Environment Logo:

Environmental Choice/EcoLogo



Green Seal



Design for the Environment



1 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "National Health Interview Survey," pp. 76–84. (Also see, "Fast Stats A to Z: Asthma," available at <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/asthma.htm>.)

2 US Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Air and Radiation, "Asthma Facts," EPA-402-F-04-019, May 2005, available at http://www.epa.gov/asthma/pdfs/asthma_fact_sheet_en.pdf.

3 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "National Health Interview Survey," pp. 76–84. (Also see, "Fast Stats A to Z: Asthma," available at <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/asthma.htm>.)

4 Ibid.

5 Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America (AAFA), "Asthma Facts and Figures," no date, available at <http://www.aafa.org/display.cfm?id=8&sub=42>.