



Green Cleaners and Disinfectants

By Lindsay Coulter

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QUESTION:

I work with children and we're trying to green our workplace. We use a disinfectant to clean our toys and play areas, but it's terribly toxic. It is our policy to use this disinfectant. What should I look for in a non-toxic alternative?
Lori, Vancouver, B.C.

There are safer and equally effective alternatives to conventional disinfectants and anti-bacterial products. In fact, our recent obsession with germs has the Canadian Medical Association calling on the federal government to ban all anti-bacterial household products because of fears they cause bacterial resistance. And you're right to be concerned about your clients, the kids — not to mention the staff who have to apply the toxic chemicals.

Kids are not miniature adults. Kilogram for kilogram they absorb more chemicals than adults. To start, children are closer to the ground. They also have what some experts call an "exploratory nature" which means they put everything in their mouths!

Find a safer disinfectant (and any household

cleaning product) by choosing those with ingredients listed, plant-based ingredients, and the Green Seal or EcoLogo-certified label.

The Green Seal standard, for example, certifies thousands of products and services that meet science-based environmental standards from all-purpose cleaners to paints.

Certification guarantees that products perform as well as or better than conventional products. And that's not all, ingredients are biodegradable and do not contain phthalates, heavy metals or optical brighteners.

It can be tricky for us consumers because companies that manufacture cleaning products are not required by law to list ingredients.

I suggest leaving those products on the shelf. If you can find an ingredient list, avoid "chlor" compounds, fragrance and triclosan. Triclosan in particular is one of the most common anti-bacterial agents in household cleaners and personal-care products.

It's suspected of interfering with hormone function and contributes to antibiotic-resistant bacteria. Triclosan is also harmful to fish and wildlife.

No matter what field you work in, if you are you interested in greening your workplace, check out davidsuzuki.org.