



FAQ from Center for Environmental Health's *Home Virtual Town Hall held on August 21, 2020*

Our science experts at the Center for Environmental Health (CEH) worked with our panel of speakers to answer frequently asked questions received for the *Home Virtual Town Hall* on August 21, 2020. We hope that this information helps you keep your home healthy!

Questions about cleaning, sanitizing, and disinfecting

What are proper cleaning and disinfecting techniques?

The first important step prior to disinfecting is cleaning. Use cleaners that meet any of the following certifications: EPA's Safer Choice, EcoLogo, or Green Seal. Thorough cleaning is essential to remove dirt, dust, etc. that would block the disinfectant from being able to reach the surface that you are trying to disinfect.

How can we find safer products for cleaning and disinfecting our homes during and after COVID?

Refer to our [Safer Disinfectants resources](#).

We also recommend two ECOS disinfectants, which are coming soon in Fall 2020:

- ECOS® Multi-Purpose Disinfectant Wipes, fresh citrus
- ECOS® Multi-Purpose Disinfectant & Sanitizer, Fresh Citrus

What cleaning products should we avoid?

Refer to the CEH [Safer Disinfectant Factsheet](#).

ECOS refers to a list called the 500 Nasties, or chemicals they do not include in their products. You can find that ingredient list [here](#).

What is the California Cleaning Product Right to Know Act that was mentioned during the town hall?

Here is a [summary from EWG](#). Essentially, it requires known hazardous chemicals in home and commercial cleaning products to be listed online and on product labels.

Are there serious health issues we should be concerned about using alcohol as a disinfectant?

CEH considers alcohol to be a safe disinfectant, but it is a good idea to use with good ventilation. You can read our blog [Tips to Protect Yourself from the Coronavirus and Toxic Chemicals](#) and visit our [Safer Disinfectants resources](#) for more information.

What are the safest non-toxic hand sanitizers to kill germs, including COVID-19?

You can find safe options on the [Skin Deep website](#).

What do you think of the effectiveness of using grain alcohol mixed with pure aloe vera gel and citric acid as a homemade hand sanitizer?

As long as the final mix is 60% alcohol, it should be both safe and effective. Please note that if you mix anything with the alcohol, the alcohol must be *greater* than 120 proof (60% alcohol) to be effective and maintain a 60% alcohol content.

Does vacuuming stir up particulates in the air, and if so is a wet mop better?

Wet mopping is great for floors and hard surfaces since it does not stir up the particulates. However, vacuuming with a HEPA filter is also important for carpets, rugs, and other soft sources that can't be wet mopped.

Which ingredients in hand sanitizers should we avoid to prevent endocrine disruption?

Refer to the [Skin Deep website](#).

Can you speak to the use of bleach during the pandemic?

Bleach is a disinfectant and kills all microbes, both good and bad. It is also an irritant and can trigger asthma. There are safer choices available. Refer to the CEH [Safer Disinfectant Factsheet](#) and [infographic](#).

Important Warning: Another caution regarding bleach is that you should **not** mix products containing bleach with *any* other cleaners. When bleach and other ingredients are mixed they can create highly toxic chlorine gas, which can be deadly.

Will using Lysol spray exacerbate allergies or breathing difficulties?

There are many different Lysol products with different ingredients, but there is one that has safer ingredients. Refer to this CEH [infographic](#) for more information.

Due to the biochemically safe ingredients, is Simplygreen better for you than most of the popular cleaning products such as Lysol wipes?

CEH recommends cleaning products with the Safer Choice logo. Refer to the EPA's [Safer Choice Product list](#).

What are the best non-toxic laundry detergents?

You can refer to the EPA's [Safer Choice Product list](#) to find safer cleaning products including laundry detergent.

What are the safest disinfectants our housekeeping and custodial staff can use to disinfect high touch surfaces in a university environment?

Refer to CEH's [Safer Disinfectant Factsheet](#).

Should we be concerned about the disinfectants that schools will be using to spray in the air in places like classrooms and school buses?

It has been difficult to identify what is being used in the sprays used in schools. In one case, an academic was able to identify the chemicals being used in the spray at her university as containing Quaternary Ammonium Compounds (QAC), which are asthma triggers. QACs (also called Quats) include chemicals such as: benzalkonium chloride, alkyl dimethyl benzyl ammonium chlorides, and others. There are more than 200 products on the EPA's "N" list (products that are deemed to be effective against the coronavirus) that include QACs. Cleaners with these chemicals should be avoided. Refer to our [Safer Disinfectant Factsheet](#) and [infographic](#) for more information.

How can we safely wash fruits and vegetables?

These are the FDA recommendations:

1. Wash your hands for 20 seconds with warm water and soap before and after preparing fresh produce.
2. If damage or bruising occurs before eating or handling, cut away the damaged or bruised areas before preparing or eating.
3. Rinse produce BEFORE you peel it, so dirt and bacteria aren't transferred from the knife onto the fruit or vegetable.
4. Gently rub produce while holding under plain running water. There's no need to use soap or a produce wash.
5. Use a clean vegetable brush to scrub firm produce, such as melons and cucumbers.
6. Dry produce with a clean cloth or paper towel to further reduce bacteria that may be present.
7. Remove the outermost leaves of a head of lettuce or cabbage.

Which hand sanitizers contain methanol?

Refer to the [FDA website](#) for information on methanol in hand sanitizers.

How can workers reduce the dangers of cleaning and disinfecting with toxic ingredients?

Refer to the CDC's [employer guidance for cleaning and disinfecting](#).

Bottom line: Avoid the overuse of disinfectants. Just because a little is okay, that does not mean more is better. And remember, the first step before disinfecting is cleaning. Cleaning first helps clear away the dirt and dust; this is important so that the disinfectant reaches the actual surface you want to disinfect--plus it helps to limit the amount of disinfectant used.

Questions about health and immunity

What long-term impacts on children's health are researchers worried about around all of the cleaners being used to combat the coronavirus?

One [comprehensive longitudinal study](#) showed that frequent use of household cleaning products in early life was associated with an increased risk for childhood wheeze and asthma at age 3 years.

How prevalent is MCS or Multiple Chemical Sensitivity?

One [international study](#) investigated the prevalence of chemical sensitivity in four countries—the United States (US), Australia (AU), Sweden (SE), and the United Kingdom (UK). Using nationally representative population samples in each country, data were collected in June 2016 and June 2017 through on-line cross-sectional surveys of adults ($n = 4435$). Results found that, across the four countries, 19.9% of the population report chemical sensitivity, 7.4% report medically diagnosed MCS.

Should we be worried about the long-term immunological effects of children NOT getting exposed to germs (besides COVID) that they should otherwise be getting exposed to during this time in their lives? What can we do to ensure that they build up strong immune systems?

We suggest lots of outdoor play--please refer to the [Nature article that supports](#) this idea.

Should we be worried about hand sanitizer use by young children who put their hands in their mouths?

Whenever possible use soap and water to wash you and your children's hands. If that's not possible, here is the CDC advice: "hand sanitizers should be stored away, and out of sight of children under six years of age and should be used with adult supervision." CEH recommends checking the [Skin Deep website](#) to find safer hand sanitizers.

Is there an important health difference between using AC and having open windows during COVID?

The CDC advice about this is complicated:

<https://www.epa.gov/coronavirus/indoor-air-homes-and-coronavirus-covid-19>.

Basically, outdoor air is good (unless of course it's smoky or otherwise highly polluted). Be aware that air conditioners sometimes can use outdoor air. It's also good to upgrade the filters on the air conditioner.

Questions about consumer and household products

Is there a digital directory of toxic chemicals in household products, or of toxic household products one might purchase online or in a store?

https://retailerreportcard.com/2019/11/retailer-rankings-2019/?fwp_sector=drugstore

Where can I find non-toxic furniture and to avoid flame retardants?

CEH created a [list of furniture products](#) that do not contain flame retardant chemicals or other chemicals of concern in furniture including fluorinated stain treatments, antimicrobials which have not been shown to reduce the spread of infection, PVC (vinyl) and formaldehyde, and other Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs).

Regarding flame retardant chemicals, thanks to a change in an outdated and ineffective furniture flammability regulation, furniture no longer needs to use flame retardant chemicals to meet the standard. Instead, companies can simply use smolder-resistant fabrics.

CEH also co-sponsored a bill that requires that companies that sell products in the State of California (most of the large national brands) must label their products for the absence or presence of flame retardant chemicals. The label is usually under the seat of a chair or under a cushion of a couch, or sometimes under the couch itself.

Finally, CEH also co-sponsored a successful bill that banned the sale of furniture with flame retardant chemicals in the State of California. Given the size of the California market, most companies are making furniture without the use of flame retardant chemicals nationally. Look for the label, and if it does not say “**contains NO added flame retardant chemicals**” do not buy it! They are not needed to provide adequate fire safety.



How can we safely dispose of cleaner containers and solutions?

Recycle containers used for household cleaners if possible. Use Safer Choice cleaners and you won't need to worry about disposal of toxic chemicals.

We would like to thank our stellar team of CEH staff and speakers for their contributions to the virtual town hall and this FAQ document! If you missed the event or would like to watch it again, you can find the recording [here](#).

If you enjoyed this document or our town hall, please consider [making a donation](#) to CEH to support our bold work to protect you and your family from toxic chemicals!

Join us on Friday, October 2nd for our next virtual town all on why this election matters more than ever for environmental health and justice. [RSVP today!](#)