**Health Concerns**
Household chemicals can be toxic to our health and to the environment. A wide variety of toxic or hazardous chemicals are routinely used as ingredients for cleaning products. 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 in utero, through inhalation, skin and eye contact, and ingestion.

**What’s the Difference?**
Make sure the product you choose is doing the job you need it to do.

Routine **cleaning** with detergent and water is the most useful method for removing germs from surfaces in the child care setting.

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.

**Choose Safer Cleaning Products**
Safer cleaning products are not only less toxic and environmentally safe, but they also often cost the same as conventional cleaners.

*portions adapted from Caring for Our Children, 3rd Edition*
chlorine bleach solutions are out of the reach of children, as bleach can cause severe damage to eyes and skin, and may be harmful if swallowed.

Keep in mind that there are safe, effective alternatives to chlorine bleach. Healthier options are peroxide-based bleach products that are registered by EPA for use in sanitizing and disinfecting. Remember to always use the least-toxic cleaner, sanitizer, or disinfectant. For EPA-registered sanitizers and disinfectants, visit: www.epa.gov/ saferchoice.

**Paints and Finishes**
Indoor air can be more polluted than outdoor air. Off-gassing from paints and finishes is one of the main sources of poor indoor air quality. For years after paint is applied, low-levels of volatile organic compounds (VOCs) are released into the air. VOCs are organic compounds, such as benzene, formaldehyde, and toluene, that readily evaporate and thus can be inhaled. VOCs are associated with a variety of adverse health effects. These chemicals were standard ingredients in paints and finishes. Now low– or no-VOC paints can be found easily in local stores. Be sure to select those options to protect children’s health, and your own.

**Aerosols**
Keep aerosol spray away! Aerosol sprays - such as deodorants, hair sprays, carpet cleaners, furniture polish and air fresheners - spew invisible droplets of chemicals into the air. The invisible droplets are inhaled by children and can trigger asthma and allergy symptoms.

**Bleach**
Read the label to find the concentration of sodium hypochlorite (bleach) in the product to make sure you are using the right amount of bleach and water.

*For an 8.25% sodium hypochlorite (bleach) solution,* follow this helpful guidance offered by the National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education: http://cfoc.nrckids.org/Bleach/Bleach.cfm.

- Use only an EPA-registered, unscented product. The product you purchased should have a label that says EPA Reg# and lists the number.
- Follow the manufacturer’s instructions.

*For a 5.25-6% sodium hypochlorite (bleach) solution,* continue to follow the dilution and contact time instructions provided in Appendix J of Caring for Our Children, available at: http://cfoc.nrckids.org/WebFiles/AppedicesUpload/AppendixJ.pdf.

**Household Chemicals Resources**
- Caring for Our Children: National Health and Safety Performance Standards; Guidelines for Early Care and Education Programs, 3rd Edition (See Appendix J for information on Bleach) http://cfoc.nrckids.org/
- Green Cleaning, Sanitizing, and Disinfecting: A Toolkit for Early Care and Education cerch.org/research-programs/child-care/greencleaningtoolkit/
- Eco-Healthy FAQs on Fragrances www.cehn.org/ehcc/ToxFAQs
- Bleach Solutions public.health.oregon.gov/HealthyPeopleFamilies/Babies/HealthChildcare/Pages/bleach.aspx

*Eco-Healthy Child Care® is a science-based, award-winning national program that seeks to improve the environmental health of children by partnering with child care professionals to eliminate or reduce environmental health hazards found in child care facilities.*

---

**Eco-Healthy Child Care®**
c/o Children’s Environmental Health Network
110 Maryland Ave. NE Suite 404 | Washington, DC 20002
202.543.4033, ext. 13

Copyright © 2016 Children’s Environmental Health Network