



# Eco-Healthy Child Care®

Eco-Healthy Child Care® helps early childhood learning environments to be as healthy, safe and green as possible by reducing children's exposure to toxic chemicals.



## Household Chemicals

### 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.

*Green Seal* and *ECOLOGO* are non-profit companies that research and certify products that are biodegradable and environmentally friendly. Visit [www.greenseal.org](http://www.greenseal.org) and/or search for *ECOLOGO* certified products in the *UL Sustainable Product Guide* to verify whether the products you use are safe, healthy and effective. Additionally, the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has created *Safer Choice*. This label verifies that the product ingredients have been thoroughly reviewed by the EPA review. EPA also has *Safer Choice Fragrance-Free*, a label for products without fragrance. Visit <http://www.epa.gov/saferchoice>.

### Proper Sanitization and Disinfection

Properly diluted unscented regular strength household bleach is commonly used to sanitize and disinfect in child care, as it is easily accessible and affordable. **IMPORTANT:** Household bleach is now being sold in a variety of concentrations. It is very important to identify the concentration of sodium hypochlorite, the active ingredient, in the product you purchase so that you can mix the correct amount of bleach and water. The higher the percentage of sodium hypochlorite, the stronger the bleach is.

Mixing an effective yet safe ratio of bleach to water is important. If too much bleach is used, it can affect the breathing of some children; if too little bleach is used, the solution will not properly sanitize or disinfect.

Any leftover solution should be discarded at the end of the day. Keep the bleach solution you mix each day in a cool place out of direct sunlight. Always ensure that

\*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](http://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.

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

For more information regarding dilution and contact time instructions provided in Appendix J of *Caring for Our Children*, see: <http://nrckids.org/files/appendix/AppendixJ.pdf>.

#### FOR MORE INFORMATION

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Email: [ehcc@cehn.org](mailto:ehcc@cehn.org)

Visit: [www.cehn.org/ehcc](http://www.cehn.org/ehcc)

### 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://nrckids.org/CFOC>
- *Green Cleaning, Sanitizing, and Disinfecting: A Toolkit for Early Care and Education*  
[https://cerch.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/green\\_cleaning\\_toolkit.pdf](https://cerch.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/green_cleaning_toolkit.pdf)
- *Eco-Healthy FAQs on Fragrances*  
[www.cehn.org/ehcc/ToxFAQs](http://www.cehn.org/ehcc/ToxFAQs)
- *Guidelines for Mixing Bleach Solutions for Child Care and Similar Environments*  
<https://www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/8340/970-216-Disinfect-en-L.pdf>
- *Bleach Solutions*  
<https://www.oregon.gov/oha/PH/HEALTHYPEOPLEFAMILIES/BABIES/HEALTHCHILDCARE/Pages/sanitize.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®

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