

# Healthy Cleaners for Safer Child Care

*What to avoid, what to use, and where to use it*



**Most cleaning products do not list all ingredients**, making it difficult to tell good from bad, especially as more products are labeled with confusing terms like “green” or “natural.” These words do not guarantee a safer product! **Chemicals in cleaning products can pollute indoor air and cause health problems for children and adults.** When cleaning products go down the drain, they cause water pollution and can harm plants and animals.

## What to Avoid:

**Ammonia:** Irritates the eyes and lungs. Linked to kidney and liver problems. Reacts with bleach to form poisonous chlorine gas – be careful!

✓ **Spot it:** Window sprays, oven cleaners, floor cleaners. Ammonia is often labeled.

**Bleach (sodium hypochlorite):** Irritates eyes, skin, & lungs. Can be fatal if swallowed.

✓ **Spot it:** Many all-purpose sprays, scrubs, wipes and toilet cleaners, like Comet®, Clorox® and Scrubbing Bubbles® products. Bleach is advertised on packaging.

**Nonylphenol ethoxylates (NPEs):** Harms the hormone and reproductive systems of aquatic animals. Look for products without “nonyl-” or “ethoxy-” or check EWG’s cleaners database: [www.ewg.org/cleaners](http://www.ewg.org/cleaners)

✓ **Spot ‘em:** some laundry detergents, stain removers.

**Phthalates:** Carry fragrance in cleaners, deodorizers, & laundry products. They can cause airway inflammation and act like hormones, leading to reproductive problems.

✓ **Spot ‘em:** Can be in any artificial fragrance. The formulas are tightly guarded secrets, so consumers do not get to know. Look for *fragrance-free* items, NOT *unscented*- which may have added scents to mask other smells.



## What Can I Do?

- **Avoid** cleaners marked “Danger” or “Warning”
- **Never** mix cleaners together- you could create a dangerous chemical reaction.
- **Call** the manufacturer and ask which chemicals they use. Tell them you prefer non-toxic cleaners.
- **Look** for commercial products containing the third-party certified “Green Seal” label. ([www.greenseal.org](http://www.greenseal.org))



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## Use the Right Product for the Job:

- **Avoid** unnecessary exposure and **save money** by using the right product in the right area.
- **Always** clean items to remove dirt before sanitizing or disinfecting.
- **Only** use the amount of cleaner needed and **clean** often to avoid the need for heavy duty cleaners.
- **Always** have good ventilation when cleaning.

Child Care Area	Clean	Sanitize	Disinfect
General surfaces: counters, shelves, windows, floors	X		
High-use objects: faucets, door knobs, railings, toys	X	X	
Kitchen: dishware & utensils	X	X	
Food counters, tables, trays	X		X
Mouthed toys	X		X
Bathrooms, diaper changing areas	X		X
Any surface with bodily fluids (blood, urine, saliva, etc.)	X		X

### What about bleach?

**Good news - bleach is not the only option for sanitizing or disinfecting.** You must use a product registered by the EPA for use in the childcare setting – and now there are safer choices! Try Alpha HP, CleanCide® or Benefect. None require rinsing, and Benefect is safe for food-contact surfaces!

Find more details at: [greenschools.net/downloads/DisinfectantsTable.pdf](https://greenschools.net/downloads/DisinfectantsTable.pdf)



## Do it Yourself Cleaners:

These cleaners cost only \$1 or so to make, and last for many uses. **You can be safe for kids AND save money.**

**All-Purpose Cleaner:** Instead of chemical sprays, mix 1-t. liquid soap & ¼-c. baking soda in ½-gal. hot water. Spray on surfaces & wipe.

**Laundry products:** Instead of bleach, add 1-c. vinegar per load to brighten colors.

**Scrubbing powder:** Instead of toxic scrubs, mix 1-c. each baking soda, salt & borax (optional). Sprinkle and scrub.

**Window cleaner:** Instead of ammonia cleaners, mix 2-c. water with 3 tablespoons vinegar and 1-drop liquid soap. Wipe window with a lint-free cloth.



**\*ALWAYS label cleaners and store out of reach of children\***

## For More Information:

- Cleaners database, with ratings: [www.ewg.org/cleaners](http://www.ewg.org/cleaners)
- New York Green Cleaning Program: [greencleaning.ny.gov](http://greencleaning.ny.gov)
- NYS Office of Children & Family Services: 518-473-7793, [www.ocfs.state.ny.us](http://www.ocfs.state.ny.us)
- NYS Bleach Regulations: [justgreenpartnership.typepad.com/NYS\\_OCFS\\_Bleach.pdf](http://justgreenpartnership.typepad.com/NYS_OCFS_Bleach.pdf)

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