

Cleaning for Asthma-Safe Schools Microfiber Pilot Project

The Work-Related Asthma Prevention Program has launched the [Cleaning for Asthma-Safe Schools Microfiber Pilot Project](#). The project provides schools with an asthma-safer way to clean, thereby minimizing the use of cleaning chemicals, sanitizers and disinfectants, which can cause or trigger asthma.

Cleaning in schools should be done primarily by custodial staff with the proper training to clean safely. But teachers and other staff often want to clean their classrooms throughout the day, and many use chemicals brought in from home or by parents. Overuse and misuse of disinfectants is particularly a problem, as these chemicals are pesticides, designed to kill germs. While they are important to protect health in some instances, they contain harmful chemicals, and therefore, should only be used when necessary by staff trained to use them safely. So what can teachers do to keep their classrooms clean and healthy on a day-to-day basis?



Teacher cleaning desk with a microfiber cloth

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends routine cleaning to remove dirt and stop the spread of germs, which is different than sanitizing or disinfecting. Microfiber cloths are a valuable and versatile tool in the asthma-safer cleaning toolbox. By participating in the [Cleaning for Asthma-Safe Schools Microfiber Pilot Project](#), teachers and other staff will receive microfiber cloths for cleaning in their classroom, leaving the use of chemicals, when required, to trained custodians.

What is microfiber?

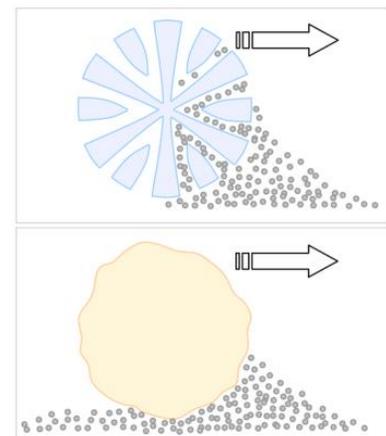
Microfiber cloths contain fibers that are about 1/100th the size of a human hair, so they can trap and remove soils and germs without the need for chemicals. The tiny fibers penetrate cracks that traditional cloths cannot, and they carry an electric charge that attracts dust.

How can cleaning with microfiber help reduce chemical use in schools?

- You can remove crayon markings, dry erase markers, dust, crumbs, or other small particles with a dry microfiber cloth.
- You can clean up paint, sticky or greasy food, glue residue, pens, markers (including some permanent markers), or other grime with a microfiber cloth dampened with water.
- Tougher cleanup jobs on some surfaces like grease, permanent markers, and pen marks, may require a microfiber cloth with hand soap and water.

Regular cleaning of high-touch areas with a third-party-certified (e.g., Green Seal, EcoLogoⁱ) all-purpose cleaner and a microfiber cloth is considered by experts to be sufficient to reduce the number of germs to an acceptable level for public health.ⁱⁱ

Regular cleaning with microfiber removes up to 99% of germsⁱⁱⁱ, so by cleaning with microfiber, schools can maintain healthier classrooms without exposing school staff and students to chemicals in cleaning products.



Cross sections--microfiber thread above, cotton thread below^{iv}

How to enroll in the Cleaning for Asthma-Safe Schools Microfiber Pilot Project

Districts participating in the Cleaning for Asthma-Safe Schools Microfiber Pilot Project will receive microfiber cloths, relevant resources, a copy of [Healthy Cleaning & Asthma-Safer Schools: A How-To Guide](#), and technical assistance. If your school district would like to participate, please send an email to workrelatedasthma@cdph.ca.gov.

Include the following information in your email:

1. Name/Title
2. School district
3. City and county
4. Phone number and email address
5. The number and type of schools (elementary, middle school, high school, other), total number of students and staff

New Requirements for Disinfectant Use in Schools

The updated California Healthy Schools Act regulation recognizes that disinfectants, like other pesticides, can be hazardous to use and that special training is required to use them in a school setting. Beginning July 2016, any school staff member who uses disinfectants, including disinfectant wipes, will be required to take a Department of Pesticide Regulation-approved training. If a staff member does not use disinfectants or other pesticides at school, the Healthy Schools Act training is not required.

Keeping disinfectants in a classroom may lead to them being overused or misused. Having disinfectants where children can get to them also violates the label, which is against the law. Disinfectants should never be used by children and never be used to clean skin, including hands. Most of the time regular cleaning is adequate to keep a classroom healthy and safe. If disinfectants are needed, such as for cleaning up blood or vomit, this should be done by a custodian who has been trained to use hazardous products properly.

For more information visit: <http://apps.cdpr.ca.gov/schoolipm/training/main.cfm>

ⁱ For more information about third-party certified cleaners, visit

<http://www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/ohsep/Documents/GS-ELStandards.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Rose L, and Westinghouse C. (2010). Cleaning for Healthier Schools—Infection Control Handbook, 2010 p. 2. Retrieved from <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/ohsep/Documents/CleanSchoolsHandbook.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ Environmental Protection Agency Region 9 Pollution Prevention Program. (2002). Environmental Best Practices for Health Care Facilities: Using Microfiber Mops in Hospitals [Fact sheet]. p. 3. Retrieved from <http://www.epa.gov/region9/waste/p2/projects/hospital/mops.pdf>

^{iv} Cross section of microfiber and cotton threads by Vassia Atanassova in the Public Domain on Wikipedia. Retrieved from <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Microfiber-vs-Cotton.png>