



HEALTHY AND ASTHMA-SAFER CLEANING IN THE CLASSROOM: INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

Use healthy and asthma-safer cleaning products to protect yourself, your co-workers, and your students. Simple changes can help reduce your chemical use in the classroom.

Health Hazards of Cleaning Products, Sanitizers, and Disinfectants

Some cleaning products, sanitizers, and disinfectants, including disinfectant wipes, contain hazardous ingredients. Chemicals in these products can cause eye or skin burns, skin rashes, or headaches. Some have been associated with cancer, reproductive harm, or hormone disruption. These products can also cause asthma or make it worse. Children are vulnerable to chemicals, and it's safest to not use chemicals around them.

How to Keep a Classroom Healthy

1. Determine whether to clean, sanitize, or disinfect

Cleaning removes dirt and germs (viruses and bacteria) by washing or wiping surfaces like desks and countertops. Cleaning also reduces exposures to asthma triggers like mold and dust.

Sanitizers and **disinfectants** are pesticides. Sanitizers are products that **reduce** germs on a surface, whereas disinfectants **eliminate** them. If used incorrectly, you can expose people to harmful chemicals without actually killing the germs. You might also be making the germs into superbugs that can resist chemical disinfection. We recommend asking trained custodians to

sanitize and disinfect when needed.

There is a lot of confusion and misinformation about the right way to clean or disinfect a classroom. The key concept: different activities require varying levels of sanitation. Follow the examples in the table below as a guide.

2. Use microfiber for simple clean-up jobs

Teachers up and down California are now cleaning with microfiber cloths as a safer alternative to using chemical cleaners and disinfectants. They also keep products like wipes out of the landfill, as microfiber can be re-used hundreds of times. Microfiber cloths can trap and remove soil and germs. The tiny fibers penetrate cracks that traditional cloths cannot, and they attract dust. Microfiber is safe to use on a variety of surfaces, including desks, sinks, white boards, computer screens, mirrors, and glass.



Ways to Clean with Microfiber

- Remove crayon, dry erase markers, dust, and crumbs with a dry microfiber cloth.
- Clean paint, sticky or greasy food, glue residue, pens, markers, or other grime with a microfiber cloth and water.
- Use a microfiber cloth with hand soap and water for tougher jobs like grease, some permanent markers, and pen marks.

WHEN TO CLEAN:

- When eating in class
- During and after art projects
- Dusting or cleaning dirty, greasy, or sticky surfaces
- For spills and daily maintenance

WHEN TO ASK A CUSTODIAN TO SANITIZE OR DISINFECT:

- After removal of body fluids like vomit, blood, or feces
- Outbreaks like norovirus or when recommended by the Local Health Department
- When required by law

Storing Microfiber

Schools can store microfiber cloths in each classroom, in the custodial closet, or in common areas (staff lounge and front office). Some schools may have separate bins for soiled and clean cloths. Teachers, custodians, students, parent volunteers, and other school staff can help by dropping off and picking up the cloths from classrooms or common areas.

Washing Microfiber

If cloths are only lightly soiled, you can rinse them for re-use. Once soiled, launder or handwash microfiber with a mild detergent. Wash separately to maintain effectiveness. Hang to dry or machine dry at a low setting without fabric softeners.

Where to wash the cloths depends on the resources in your school. Onsite options may include a laundry facility in the custodial closet, utility room, kitchen, or science classroom. Off-site options could include a different school within the school district, a laundromat, or at home. Teachers, parent volunteers, or school staff can wash the cloths.

3. Take mandatory training on sanitizers or disinfectants if you use them

Sanitizing and disinfecting require special training, and improper use is against the law. Any school staff or volunteer who uses a pesticide, including sanitizers, disinfectants, and disinfectant wipes, must take an annual Healthy Schools Act training. If teachers and volunteers don't use pesticides, they are not required to take the training. To learn more, visit:

[California Department of Pesticide Regulation Required Training website](https://apps.cdpr.ca.gov/schoolipm/training/main.cfm) (apps.cdpr.ca.gov/schoolipm/training/main.cfm).



4. Avoid fragrances

Fragrances in cleaning products, air fresheners, perfumes, and personal care products are a combination of many chemicals, some of which have been associated with cancer, endocrine disruption, and asthma. Avoid scented products and use fragrance-free products when possible.

Find and fix the source of a smell, rather than use a fragrance or an air freshener to try to cover it up. For example, repairing water leaks to stop mold growth is safer and more effective.

5. Wash hands

Handwashing is one of the most important steps to prevent illness. Please help children practice good handwashing, reminding them to wash their hands for 20 seconds. Need a timer? Ask them to hum the "Happy Birthday" song from beginning to end twice.

For more information, call the California Department of Public Health's Work-Related Asthma Prevention Program (WRAPP): 1-800-970-6680 (toll-free to California callers), email workrelatedasthma@cdph.ca.gov, or go to [WRAPP's website](http://www.cdph.ca.gov/wrapp/asthma) (www.cdph.ca.gov/wrapp/asthma). California Relay Service: 711. To get a copy of this fact sheet in another format, please call (510) 620-5757. Allow at least 10 days.