
CLEANING WITH MICROFIBER MAKES CLASSROOMS ASTHMA-SAFER FOR ALL

The California Department of Public Health's Work-Related Asthma Prevention Program (WRAPP) has begun its second year of a pilot project to help schools clean classroom desks and counters with microfiber cloths. Microfiber is a highly effective cleaning tool that is also safer for asthma. WRAPP conducted year 1 of the Cleaning for Asthma-Safe Schools Microfiber Pilot Project during the 2016-2017 school year. This fact sheet shares the knowledge gained from the 20 California schools and school districts that participated in the project.

It is well recognized that some cleaning products and disinfectants can cause or trigger asthma. This is one of the reasons for the national movement among schools to reduce their use of cleaning and disinfecting chemicals. Routine cleaning with microfiber safely removes dirt and germs without the use of chemicals or disinfectants (disinfectants are pesticides). Page two discusses disinfectants and provides additional resources.

MICROFIBER USE REDUCES CHEMICALS

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 (even some permanent markers), or other grime with a microfiber cloth and water.
- Use a microfiber cloth with hand soap and water for tougher cleanup jobs like grease, some permanent markers, and pen marks.

STORING AND WASHING MICROFIBER

If cloths are only lightly soiled, you can rinse them for re-use. Once soiled, wash microfiber with a mild detergent. Air dry or machine dry at a low setting, and wash separately (without other materials like cotton cloths) to maintain effectiveness.



Photo: teacher using a microfiber cloth

Pilot sites stored microfiber cloths in various places including in each classroom, in the custodial closet, or in common areas (staff lounge and front office). Many schools used separate bins for soiled and clean cloths. Teachers, custodians, students, parent volunteers, and school staff dropped off and picked up the cloths.

Where to wash the cloths depended partially on the resources in each school. Onsite options included a laundry facility in the custodial closet, the science room, and the kitchen. Off-site options included a different school within the school district, a laundromat, and at home. Teachers, parent volunteers, school secretaries, custodians, and kitchen staff washed the cloths.

“Teachers love the microfiber. They appreciate not having to use chemicals. They’re using the cloths and they’re finding out how great they are. Before, they’d ask parents to bring disinfectant wipes and now they don’t.”

—CAYUCOS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT, 2016 MICROFIBER PILOT PROJECT PARTICIPANT

KEY POINTS WHEN USING DISINFECTANTS

- Only custodians or other trained staff should use disinfectants.
- Disinfect only when necessary, such as when required by the health department, health code, or regulations. For example, disinfecting is necessary to clean up body fluids.
- Avoid ingredients that are not safe for asthma, like bleach, ammonia, quaternary ammonium compounds (benzalkonium chlorides), and acetic acid (found in vinegar). Learn more under “Resources.”
- Follow the label exactly for a disinfectant to work properly. The surface must be wet with the chemical for up to 10 minutes. You may need to reapply it, or use several disinfectant wipes. Using a disinfectant for less time than specified on the label exposes school staff and students to chemicals in the product but may not disinfect the surface.
- By law, you must keep disinfectants out of students' reach. Disinfectants should never be used by children or to clean skin, including hands. Use soap and water to clean hands. Keeping disinfectants in a classroom may lead to overuse and misuse, like cleaning up after a snack.

TRAINING REQUIRED IF USING CHEMICALS

The updated California Healthy Schools Act (HSA) recognizes that disinfectants can be harmful, and that special training is required. Any school staff or volunteer who uses

disinfectants, including bleach or disinfectant wipes, must take a Department of Pesticide Regulation approved training. [HSA’s website](http://apps.cdpr.ca.gov/schoolipm/training/main.cfm) (<http://apps.cdpr.ca.gov/schoolipm/training/main.cfm>)

Also, California regulations require that workers have the right to know about any harmful substances they are exposed to at work. In addition to disinfectants, many cleaning chemicals are considered hazardous and are covered by Cal/OSHA’s Hazard Communication standard. Your employer must give you information and training about chemicals, how they affect your health, and how to protect yourself. [Hazard Communication Guide](http://www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/dosh_publications/hazcom.pdf) (http://www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/dosh_publications/hazcom.pdf)

If you clean without chemicals, HSA and Hazard Communication training are not required.

RESOURCES

[Guidance for School Administrators to Help Reduce the Spread of Seasonal Influenza in K-12 Schools](http://www.cdc.gov/flu/school/guidance.htm), (2016) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (www.cdc.gov/flu/school/guidance.htm)

[Healthy Cleaning & Asthma-Safer Cleaning: A How-To Guide](https://tinyurl.com/CLASSguidelines) (<https://tinyurl.com/CLASSguidelines>)

- Recommended Labeling Programs, Page 26
- Asthma-Safer Disinfectants and Disinfectants That May Cause Asthma, Page 28
- Cleaning Product Ingredients That Can Cause Asthma, Page 43

For more information about work-related asthma, call the Work-Related Asthma Prevention Program in California: 1-800-970-6680 (toll-free to California callers), email workrelatedasthma@cdph.ca.gov, or [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.