



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. Of the 85,000 synthetic chemicals in commercial use today, only a small fraction has been individually tested for toxicity on human health. 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 through inhalation, skin 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 germs on an inanimate object. A disinfectant may be appropriate to use on non-porous surfaces such as diaper change 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 and/or www.ecologo.org to verify whether the products you use are safe, healthy and effective. And for companies that are striving for greener chemistry, visit EPA's Design for the Environment website www.epa.gov/dfe.

Proper Sanitization and Disinfection*

Properly diluted unscented regular strength household bleach (5.25% sodium hypochlorite) is commonly used to sanitize and disinfect, as it is easily accessible and affordable. Mixing an effective yet safe ratio of bleach to water is important. If too much bleach is used, it can be an environmental health hazard; if too little bleach is used, the solution will not properly sanitize or disinfect. Be sure to follow your state's required bleach-water ratios (dilutions vary according to state licensing laws), and always adhere to the manufacturer's instructions.

Sanitization and disinfection solutions of bleach and water lose their strength very quickly and easily. The solutions are weakened by organic material, evaporation, heat, and sunlight. Therefore, bleach solutions should be mixed fresh each day to make sure they are

*adapted from *Caring for Our Children*, 3rd edition

effective. 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 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/dfe.

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 both asthma and allergies.

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-level toxic fumes are released

into the air. Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs) are the source of these toxic emissions, and until recently, these chemicals were always used in paint and finish. Low-VOC paints can now easily be found in local stores. Be sure to purchase “low-VOC” paints to protect your health and the environment.

Recipe for Bleach Sanitizing Solution

(For use on food contact surfaces (dishes, utensils, cutting boards, high chair trays), toys that may be mouthed by children, and pacifiers).

1 tablespoon bleach

1 gallon cool water

Add the bleach to the water

After use, let stand for 2 minutes or air dry before allowing children back into the area.

Recipe for Bleach Disinfecting Solution

(For use on non-porous surfaces: diaper change tables, counter tops, door and cabinet handles, and toilets).

1/4 cup bleach

1 gallon of cool water

Add the bleach to water

After use, let stand for 2 minutes or air dry before allowing children back into the area.

Household Chemicals Resources

- Caring for Our Children: National Health and Safety Performance Standards; Guidelines for Early Care and Education Programs, 3rd Edition (CFOC3)
nrckids.org/CFOC3/CFOC3_color.pdf
- Alternative Cleaning Recipes
www.ecologycenter.org/factsheets/cleaning.html
- Third party certifiers for biodegradable, least-toxic cleaning products:
www.greenseal.org or www.ecologo.org/en
- Cleaning for Healthy Schools tool kit, National Collaborative Work Group on Green Cleaning and Chemical Policy Reform in Schools
www.cleaningforhealthyschools.org

More Household Chemicals resources can be found at: www.cehn.org/ehcc/resources

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Call: 202-543-4033, ext. 13

Email: info@ecohealthychildcare.org

Visit: www.cehn.org/ehcc

A recipient of EPA's Children's Environmental Health Excellence Award in 2006, Eco-Healthy Child Care® (EHCC) is a 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. Originally created by the Oregon Environmental Council in 2005, EHCC is now managed by Children's Environmental Health Network.

Eco-Healthy Child Care®

c/o Children's Environmental Health Network

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