

# What's the right answer to the germ question?

As your children go back to school, protect them from harmful germs without using hazardous chemicals in lunch bags, school supplies, soaps and sanitizers.

With so much worry about infections these days, it has become increasingly common to see germ-killing chemicals on the market. But are these chemicals safe for children? *No*. Are they really necessary to prevent illness? *No*. Is there a better way to protect your child's health and the environment? *Yes*.

## **Triclosan causes health and environmental problems.**

The chemical most commonly seen in hand soaps and sanitizers is an antibacterial chemical called triclosan. When used in fabrics and plastic, it is known as Microban. The chemical is associated with skin irritation or eczema, has been shown to interfere with the body's hormones, and has been linked to an increased risk of developing respiratory illness, or asthma, and cancer, as well as subtle effects on learning ability. Because the chemical goes down the drain, it wreaks havoc with the environment, converting to highly toxic dioxins and contaminating waterways and wildlife.

## **Triclosan contributes to stronger germs and less effective antibiotics.**

By killing some, but not all bacteria, widespread triclosan use has led to resistant strains and cross resistance with antibiotics. This means its use is creating greater problems. So whether you use a soap, toothpaste, deodorant with triclosan or buy a lunch bag or other school supplies with microban, you are unfortunately, contributing to a larger and stronger germ problem.

## **Handwashing with soap and water is essential.**

A Food and Drug Administration (FDA) panel (2005) concluded that triclosan soaps are no more effective than washing hands with soap and water. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommends that children wash their hands several times a day for 20 seconds or the time it takes to sing "Happy Birthday" twice. According to CDC, **hands should be washed**: before preparing or eating food; after going to the bathroom; after changing diapers; before and after tending to someone who is sick; after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing; after handling an animal or animal waste; after handling garbage; before and after treating a cut or wound.



## **Avoiding triclosan at home.**

It's easy to avoid triclosan and microban. Read the product label, whether it's a backpack, school supplies, soap or sanitizer. When shopping, know that Ikea, The Body Shop and Whole Foods sell only triclosan-free products. Below are other brands that do not use triclosan:

- CleanWell
- LUSH
- Nature's Gate
- Vermont Country
- Naked Soap Works
- MiEssence
- MiEssence
- Purell Instant Hand Sanitizer
- Ivory
- Paul's Organic
- Dr. Bronner's Magic Soaps
- Tom's of Maine
- The Natural Dentist
- Listerine Essential Care
- Peelu
- Weleda
- Toxic Free Basics
- Kiss My Face Soaps

## **Help get triclosan out of your school and beyond.**

Because of its link to resistant bacteria and adverse health effects - including asthma, cancer and learning disabilities, triclosan has no place in the classroom. Furthermore, the American Medical Association recommends against avoiding its use in consumer products.

**Tell your child's principal** that you are concerned about the use of antibacterial soap and its impact on the health of the students and staff. Ask that the school order regular soap from its usual janitorial product supplier and that all cleansers and sanitizers used by the school be triclosan-free. Cited materials on the health impacts of triclosan are available for download at the websites below.

Also, encourage your municipality, school, workplace, and religious institutions to adopt an official policy that 1) commits to not procuring or using products containing triclosan or triclocarban; 2) supports efforts to educate the community about the action it has taken and encourages other entities to adopt a similar policies; and, 3) endorses efforts to ban household and non-medical uses of triclosan. Contact us for model policy language and tips on how to get started.

- [www.beyondpesticides.org/antibacterial/triclosan.htm](http://www.beyondpesticides.org/antibacterial/triclosan.htm)
- [www.foodandwaterwatch.org/water/chemical-contaminants/what-is-lurking-in-your-soap](http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/water/chemical-contaminants/what-is-lurking-in-your-soap)

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## **For more information, contact:**

### **Beyond Pesticides**

Beyond Pesticides works with allies in protecting public health and the environment to lead the transition to a world free of toxic pesticides. Our primary goal is to effect change through local action, assisting individuals and community-based organizations to stimulate discussion on the hazards of toxic pesticides, while providing information on safer alternatives.

### **Food & Water Watch**

Food & Water Watch, a nonprofit consumer organization based in Washington, D.C., works to ensure clean water and safe food in the United States and around the world. We challenge the corporate control and abuse of our food and water resources by empowering people to take action and transforming the public consciousness about what we eat and drink.



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