

What's Wrong with Using Bleach?



Best practices for schools



Isn't bleach a good disinfectant?

Yes. Bleach is widely used because it is effective, inexpensive, and readily available. However, bleach can have several health impacts on both children and adults that should be taken into consideration:

- Bleach can make asthma worse in someone who already has asthma.
- It can cause asthma in people who never had asthma.
- Using diluted bleach in a spray bottle creates small droplets that can be inhaled into the lungs by the staff and children.
- Children are at greater risk from breathing bleach vapors because their lungs are still developing.
- Bleach can irritate the skin and eyes.
- Breathing in bleach over a long period of time can increase your risk of cancer.

- A dangerous gas can be formed when bleach is combined with certain chemicals (like ammonia).
- Bleach causes the buildup of chloroform in the air. Elevated levels of chloroform have been found in some New Jersey child care centers due to the use of bleach. Chloroform is a known cancer-causing chemical.

Is there a safer alternative to bleach?

Yes. Products that contain hydrogen peroxide (HP) as an active ingredient can be used as alternatives to bleach. HP is an effective disinfectant and sanitizer with a specified "contact time" designed to kill the microorganisms listed on the label. HP also rapidly breaks down to water and oxygen and does not leave harmful residues or introduce irritating fumes into the air.

If You Choose to Use Bleach:

- Follow the instructions provided to make safe dilutions
- Do not mix bleach with other chemicals
- Dilute by adding bleach to cool water to reduce fumes
- Wear gloves and eye protection always
- Ventilate the area
- Label, date, and cap the bottle or container
- Make a fresh bleach dilution daily due to its short shelf life
- Always clean the surfaces before you disinfect with bleach
- Call Poison Control at 1-800-222-1222 in case of an emergency



Mixing bleach with other chemicals containing ammonia, quaternary ammonium compounds (found in other disinfectants), vinegar, or other acids can create a toxic gas.