

## Create Safer and Healthier Classrooms: Tips for Teachers

Many teachers do extra cleaning to keep themselves and their students healthy. Choosing the right products is important because children are more sensitive to chemical exposures. If used inappropriately, cleaning chemicals used in schools may harm their health.



### Remember to clean **before** sanitizing or disinfecting.

Cleaning (removing dirt and grime) ensures that sanitizers or disinfectants are effective.



### Using safer cleaning products in schools helps students by:

- Improving air quality
- Reducing allergy and asthma triggers
- Reducing absenteeism

**Always use products according to the instructions on the label.**



#### **Cleaners:**

All-purpose cleaners remove dirt, grime and most bacteria and viruses. Cleaning helps remove mold and allergens that can trigger asthma.



#### **Sanitizers:**

Sanitizers bring microorganisms to safe levels on non-porous surfaces like metals, glass, and hard plastic. Labels should list the surfaces they can be used on.



#### **Disinfectants:**

Disinfectants kill bacteria and many viruses on non-porous surfaces.

For more information on choosing safer cleaning products, visit: [bit.ly/BestCleaningPractices\\_Schools](https://bit.ly/BestCleaningPractices_Schools).

*Disinfectants and sanitizers are must be registered and are regulated by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).*

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### Promote Hand Hygiene in Your School: Build handwashing into daily routines



#### Handwashing:



- Wash hands for 20 seconds using soap and water.
- Soap should be plain and fragrance-free.
- Wash hands especially at key times like after bathroom breaks, before eating, after recess, and anytime hands get dirty.
- Using antibacterial soap is not recommended. It is not better than plain soap at preventing people from getting sick and ingredients may not be safe for long-term, daily use.

#### Hand Sanitizer:

- Does **not** replace soap and water. If you can't wash your hands, use a hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol to avoid getting sick and spreading germs.
- Is **not** effective against viruses that cause vomiting and diarrhea.
- May not work well when hands are very dirty or greasy.

### Teachers should not bring common cleaning products to the classroom, like bleach and disinfecting wipes.



- The NJ Integrated Pest Management in Schools law views anti-microbials, like disinfectant wipes, as low impact pesticides.
- The law states that staff should not use wipes in the classroom while children are present.
- Some cleaners, like bleach and ammonia, create toxic vapors when mixed.
- Common household cleaners and disinfectants may not be appropriate for schools. They may cause allergic reactions or have other health impacts.
- Schools must have Material Safety Data Sheets for all chemicals used in school.

**Students should never use disinfectants.  
Disinfectant wipes (like Clorox or Lysol wipes)  
should not be used to clean hands.**

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### Air Fresheners:

- Are concentrated sources of fragrances.
- Those used in schools often include urinal cakes and “plug-ins.”
- Many contain toxic chemicals which can cause allergies and trigger asthma, wheezing and headaches.
- Some contain phthalates which can mimic or disrupt the body’s natural hormones.
- 1,4 dichlorobenzene, a major ingredient in many air fresheners, can possibly cause cancer.



For more information on air fresheners and safer alternatives, visit: [bit.ly/AirFresheners\\_Schools](https://bit.ly/AirFresheners_Schools).

### Safe Cleaning with Microfiber Cloths and Mops

Cleaning with microfiber cloths and mops are better than using cotton rags and paper towels because they:

- Dry faster than cotton.
- Are washable, durable, and inexpensive.
- Need less cleaning detergent to be effective.
- Remove more dirt, oils, grease, and germs from surfaces.



For more information on the benefits of microfiber items, visit: [bit.ly/SafeCleaning\\_MicrofiberCloths](https://bit.ly/SafeCleaning_MicrofiberCloths).

### References

- Why Indoor Air Quality is Important to Schools | US EPA: [epa.gov/iaq-schools/why-indoor-air-quality-important-schools](https://epa.gov/iaq-schools/why-indoor-air-quality-important-schools)
- How To Clean and Disinfect Early Care and Education Settings | CDC: [cdc.gov/hygiene/cleaning/early-care-education-settings.html](https://cdc.gov/hygiene/cleaning/early-care-education-settings.html)
- Public Health Statement for Dichlorobenzenes | ATSDR: [cdc.gov/TSP/PHS/PHS.aspx?phsid=702&toxid=126](https://cdc.gov/TSP/PHS/PHS.aspx?phsid=702&toxid=126)