

Can cleaning products cause asthma?



YES, they can!

You might not expect it, but cleaning products used at work can cause asthma or make your existing asthma worse. Workers who use cleaners regularly can get asthma.

Cleaning products are used by all sorts of workers, like janitors, office workers, and hospital workers. We need cleaners to clean, disinfect, and control dust and mold on surfaces. Some people who work with these cleaners, or work in areas where cleaners are used, can get breathing problems.

This is what happened to some people in their jobs:

A **hotel housekeeper** was asked to use a muriatic acid (hydrochloric acid) tile cleaner to clean the ceramic tile floors in the hotel bathrooms. The housekeeper was told by her supervisor to dilute the cleaner with water, but was not given more specific instructions. While using the acid cleaner she started coughing and became short of breath. She went to a doctor two days later when her symptoms became worse. She was diagnosed with work-related asthma. She lost a month of work because of this incident.



A **school custodian** was using a particular cleaner for the first time. He became nauseous and dizzy, and began having problem breathing. He then fainted and was taken to the emergency room. His personal doctor told him he had asthma. He had to leave his job because his employer could not offer him a position where chemicals could be avoided.

A **receptionist** in a hospital began having breathing problems when the housekeeping staff used a floor wax stripper near her work area. She was treated at the hospital several times because of her breathing problems. She was eventually diagnosed with asthma and was still taking medications four years later.

A **cleaning contractor** with a long history of asthma mixed a chlorine-based cleaner with an ammonia-based cleaner to clean an office bathroom. She immediately began having breathing problems (wheezing, cough, and shortness of breath). She considered working through the day but her symptoms got worse and she was admitted to the local hospital. Since this incident she has become more aware of what triggers her asthma and avoids working with certain products.



What are some warning signs?

Watch for these asthma signs:

- Wheezing
- Chest tightness
- Shortness of breath
- Cough

If you have any of these symptoms when you're exposed to cleaners, call your doctor. You should contact your doctor even if you weren't the person using the cleaning product or doing the cleaning. These breathing problems are not normal!

How can I avoid getting sick from using cleaning products?

- ✓ Read warning labels and follow them.
- ✓ Read the MSDS (Material Safety Data Sheet) for the products you work with.
- ✓ Wear goggles to protect your eyes when using caustic cleaners.
- ✓ Wear gloves to protect your skin. Sometimes skin contact with cleaners can cause allergies.
- ✓ Do not use a cleaner at full strength when the instructions say to dilute it with water.
- ✓ Do not mix cleaning products.
- ✓ Be careful in small rooms and where there is poor ventilation or air flow.
- ✓ Leave windows and doors open, or use a fan to circulate the air.
- ✓ Store cleaners in their original containers.
- ✓ Carefully handle leftover cleaner in buckets, on rags, and on sponges.
- ✓ Dust masks will not prevent you from breathing fumes from cleaners.
- ✓ Use less toxic cleaners whenever possible.



Who can be affected?

Here are some jobs where you might be exposed to cleaning products:

Types of Jobs

- Health care worker
- Hotel maintenance
- Housekeeper
- Janitor
- Maid
- Office worker
- Restaurant worker
- Teacher

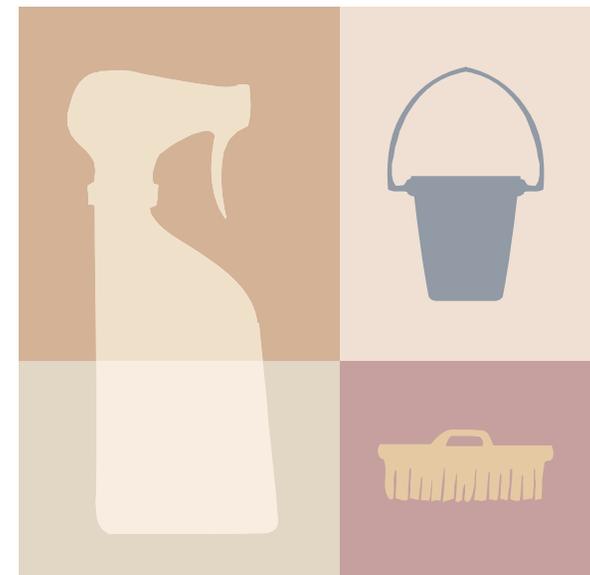
Types of Cleaners

- Carpet cleaner
- Disinfectant
- Floor wax stripper
- Glass cleaner
- Tile cleaner
- Toilet cleaner

How can I get more information?

- Ask your doctor.
- Read the MSDS or search for the Hazardous Substance Fact Sheet at nj.gov/health/rtk.
- Contact us:

NJ Department of Health
Environmental & Occupational Health
Surveillance Program
PO Box 369
Trenton, NJ 08625-0369
Phone: (609) 826-4984
Internet: nj.gov/health/surv

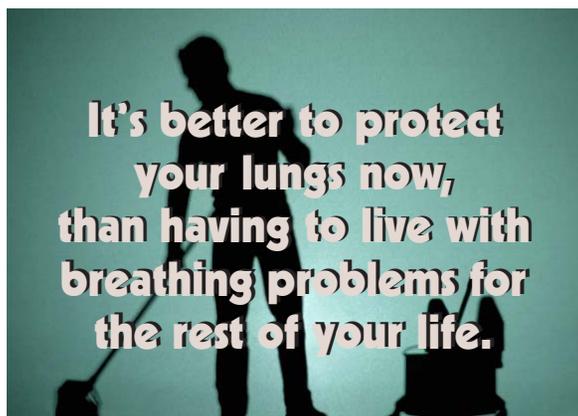


Asthma & Cleaning Products

What Workers Need to Know

Keep this number handy.
In case of an emergency, call the
National Poison Control Center

1.800.222.1222



*Adapted from "Asthma and Cleaning Agents"
Michigan State University
Division of Occupational & Environmental Medicine*



Public Health Services Branch
Consumer, Environmental and Occupational Health Service
Environmental & Occupational Health Surveillance Program