

## Antimicrobial products in the home



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Antimicrobial chemicals can reduce the spread of germs that make people sick, such as bacteria, viruses and fungi. Chlorine bleach, which can destroy harmful bacteria, is one example of an antimicrobial product.

Today, many products with antimicrobials are sold for home use. Common household cleaners, such as hand soap and dishwashing liquid, come in 'antibacterial' forms, and many products are treated with antimicrobials, from toys to kitchen utensils.

### Do antimicrobial products work?

- Handwashing using plain soap and water is still the most important way to reduce the spread of germs.
- In certain cases, some products can be very useful. For example, a solution of diluted bleach (nine parts water to one part bleach) is recommended to clean up major spills of body fluids, such as feces, vomit or blood. Alcohol-based solutions and gels can be used to wash hands if soap and water are not available.
- For the most part, although antimicrobial products have been shown to work in laboratory tests, their effectiveness in the home has not yet been proven.

### Will toys or clothing treated with antimicrobial products help stop the spread of germs?

- You don't need to buy toys that have antimicrobial products added to them.
- If children put toys in their mouths or play with them when they are sick, clean the toys with water and soap and rinse well before another child uses them.
  - Clean machine-washable plastic toys in the dishwasher and machine-washable cloth toys in the washing machine.
  - If toys can only be hand-washed, use soap and water or a diluted bleach solution.

### How can I stop the spread of viruses in my home when someone has a cold, influenza or another virus?

- Cold and influenza (or 'flu') viruses are found in the nose and throat. The viruses spread through

droplets in the air when someone coughs or sneezes. They also spread when people touch objects that have the virus on them.

- Handwashing is the most important way to reduce the spread of colds and flu:
  - When you cough or sneeze, use a tissue and throw it away. Wash your hands afterward.
  - Wash your hands after being in direct contact with someone who has a cold or the flu.
  - Wash your own hands and your child's hands after wiping your child's nose.
  - Wash your hands after touching objects handled by someone who has a virus.
  - When water and soap are not available, use premoistened hand wipes or alcohol-based hand rinses. Keep hand rinses out of the reach of children because they may be harmful if swallowed.
- In general, unless you are caring for someone who is at a higher risk of infection – a newborn baby, an elderly person or someone whose immune system is not healthy – a plain, mild soap is fine.
- When someone in your home has diarrhea or is vomiting, wash your hands often, especially after changing diapers. If floors, tables or other surfaces get dirty, use diluted chlorine bleach to clean them. It is best to wash soiled clothes right away.

### What else can I do to help reduce the spread of germs in my home?

- Vacuum and clean carpets regularly. Shake smaller rugs outdoors.
- Where young babies play, clean carpets at least once a month. Other areas should be cleaned at least every 3 months or whenever they get dirty.
- In the kitchen, handle food safely, wash your hands often and keep work areas clean:
  - When preparing raw meats and poultry, keep them away from cooked food, fresh fruits and vegetables. Use separate cutting boards for raw meats and vegetables.

**A Note from the Doctor**

- Wash your hands with hot, soapy water before and after preparing food.
- Keep your kitchen clean. Use a mild solution of soap and water, or diluted bleach, to clean your counters, cutting boards and utensils. You do not need to buy cutting boards or countertops treated with antimicrobial products.

- Surfaces that are damaged or scratched can be difficult to clean and should be replaced.

**For more information**

Antimicrobial products in the home: The evolving problem of antibiotic resistance. A position statement developed by the Canadian Paediatric Society Infectious Diseases and Immunization Committee, available at <[www.cps.ca](http://www.cps.ca)>.

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