

Antibacterial Soaps

Why we care

For over ten years researchers have been warning about the human health and environmental risks of triclosan, the chemical in most antibacterial soaps. Triclosan may cause some bacteria to become resistant to commonly used antibiotics and may interfere with our endocrine system. It has also been found to be toxic to aquatic life. The FDA has finally banned the chemical for some of these reasons. In addition, a study by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention determined, “When compared to plain soap, antibacterial soap appeared to provide no benefits in reducing rates of colds in generally healthy people.”

But many Americans want to be germ-free so the “antibiotic” label still has appeal. Liquid soap manufacturers have substituted three other chemicals that are as yet unapproved by the FDA, and health officials worry these antibacterials will have the same problems as triclosan. Why take any risk when regular soap is just as effective?

Simple, positive change

- Washing hands is the most effective way of avoiding germs. Wash with soap and running water for about 20 seconds (about as long as it takes to sing Happy Birthday).
- Commercial germ-killing products are not needed in a normal household. Regular soap, soda, and vinegar are adequate cleaners.
- Household items that do require special attention are cutting boards, kitchen sponges, and dishrags. Be sure to use a separate cutting board for meat and vegetables, and wash with hot water and soap. Microwave sponges for 2 minutes, or boil in water for 3 minutes. Launder dishrags weekly in hot water.

Questions or feedback? Contact Jeanne Roy at jeanne@earthleaders.org.