



## Creating Safer and Healthier Classrooms

### Harsh Chemicals

Disinfecting wipes (for example, Lysol and Clorox brands), contain harsh chemicals and have been linked to acute and chronic health issues. They can cause eye, skin and respiratory irritation. The fragrances and active ingredient and in these wipes (alkyl dimethyl-benzyl ammonium chloride; a quaternary ammonium compound or “quat” for short) can trigger allergic reactions and asthma. They have also been linked to hormone disruption and reproductive issues.

### 15 million school days are missed

annually due to asthma. Asthma is the most common chronic condition among children under the age of 18, affecting nearly **13,000 Vermont youth**. Reducing exposure to harmful chemicals that trigger asthma can reduce the rate of absenteeism for youth with asthma and improve overall indoor air quality in classrooms.

### Thinking of requesting disinfecting wipes this fall?

Disinfecting wipes, although easy to use, are generally not safe for classroom use. Think twice before putting these on your classroom request lists this fall.

### Why should disinfectants not be used for general classroom cleaning?

Only certain areas require the use of disinfectants. High risk areas such as bathrooms, nurse’s offices, cafeterias, drinking fountains and door handles should be disinfected. School custodial staff are trained in the proper use and handling of disinfectants. Keep in mind that disinfectants (including wipes) are registered pesticides that should only be used in accordance with the pesticide labels and should not be used in the presence of students.

### What can be used in place of disinfecting wipes?

- ✓ Go back to the basics. **Soap and water** are usually all that is needed for routine cleaning. Soap lifts dirt and germs off the surface while scrubbing carries them away.
- ✓ Ask custodial staff for a **spray bottle of all-purpose cleaner** to keep in your classroom. School cleaning chemicals in Vermont are required by the Green Cleaning Law of 2012 to be third-party certified by organizations such as EPA’s Safer Choice or Green Seal. They are certified to be safer for health and the environment.
- ✓ Request **fragrance-free baby wipes, paper towels or microfiber cloths**.

### Will my classroom still be clean?

**Yes!** Disinfecting wipes are not necessary for everyday classroom clean-up. It is a common misconception that frequent disinfection is required for the creation of a clean and safe environment. When disinfectants are overused or misused it can potentially create germs that are resistant to disinfectants.

### Additional Resources

- Health Department’s Healthy Schools page [www.HealthVermont.gov/environment/school](http://www.HealthVermont.gov/environment/school)
- Health Department’s DIY green-cleaning guide, *Living Green* [www.HealthVermont.gov/environment/home](http://www.HealthVermont.gov/environment/home)
- Health Department’s Asthma page [www.HealthVermont.gov/wellness/asthma](http://www.HealthVermont.gov/wellness/asthma)
- Washington State Department of Health’s *Classroom Cleaning Tips for Teachers* [www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/Pubs/333-218.pdf](http://www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/Pubs/333-218.pdf)