

# Cleaning Safely in Schools

Keep your school environments healthy by using safer products.

School staff work hard to make sure schools are safe and clean for students and staff. Unfortunately, some cleaners and disinfectants contain harsh chemicals that have been linked to short-term and long-term health issues.

A 2022 survey found that most Vermont schools are using cleaning products, air fresheners and disinfectants that contain chemicals which can irritate the eyes, skin, nose lungs and throat and can cause cancer and disrupt hormones. They can also cause or worsen asthma.

Choose safer products and use them correctly to keep your school environment healthy.



## Cleaning, sanitizing and disinfecting are all different processes.

Cleaning **removes** dirt as well as germs. Soap and water work great. Most of the time, cleaning is all you need to do.

Sanitizing **reduces** germs to safe levels. Sanitizers can use chemicals or steam.

Always **clean before** you sanitize.

Disinfectants **kill** germs to further reduce the spread of disease. Disinfectants are registered pesticides that need to be used according to their label.

Always **clean before** you disinfect.



## Choose and use safer products. Look for these logos.

Choose products certified by a third-party like [Green Seal](#), [Safer Choice](#) or [Design for the Environment](#). Products with these certifications are made with safer ingredients.



[epa.gov/saferchoice](http://epa.gov/saferchoice)



[epa.gov/dfe](http://epa.gov/dfe)

Sources: Informed Green Solutions, 2022

August 2024

Learn more at [HealthVermont.gov/envision](http://HealthVermont.gov/envision)

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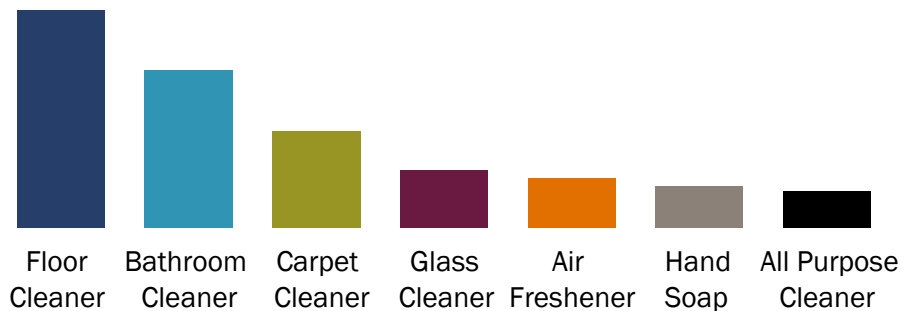


## Vendors continue to sell schools unsafe air fresheners and cleaners.

Did you know that vendors must sell schools cleaning products and air fresheners that are third-party certified? [Act 68 of 2012 requires it!](#)

Despite this, most schools (96%) were not using products that had a third-party certified logo.

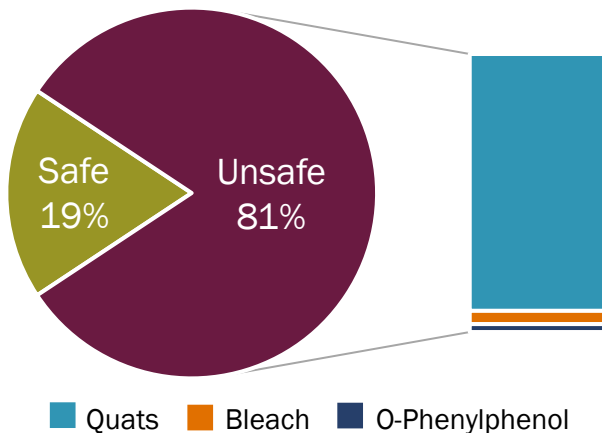
In a sample of schools, floor, bathroom and carpet cleaners were the most common unsafe cleaners found.



## Most schools use unsafe disinfectants, but safer options exist.

In a sample of schools, quats were the most common unsafe disinfectants found.

Most schools (90%) were using at least one harmful disinfectant.



Quaternary ammonium compounds (quats), the most common harmful disinfectants in Vermont schools, are often found in disinfecting wipes.

Do not use disinfecting wipes around children, and do not let children use them.



## Take these steps to create a safer and healthier school.

- ✓ Only buy products with third-party certified logos.
- ✓ Supply staff with approved products to use in their classrooms and offices.
- ✓ Prohibit parents and staff from bringing in their own products.
- ✓ Clean frequently. Sanitize and disinfect only when necessary.

Sources: Informed Green Solutions, 2022

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