

BRANCH BASICS SCHOOL TOOLKIT:

# How to Educate Schools on Safer Cleaning



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If you're concerned about the chemical cleaners used in your children's school or in your workplace, you're not alone. And you have good reason to be concerned. While it can feel overwhelming to question the cleaning protocols for the places that we feel are out of our control, there's never been a more critical time to speak up. Especially when it comes to the spaces in which we and our children spend a lot of time. Too often, disinfecting policies are put into place without examining the potential dangers of the cleaners themselves, despite well-documented research that shows the risks toxic products pose to our immune systems and overall health. The burden of duty is often on us when it comes to standing up for safer, and even more effective, options. We know, because we've been there! After facing similar situations ourselves within our churches, children's schools and even our own workplaces, coupled with the request of many concerned parents, we decided to put together this toolkit. We hope it helps you confidently approach the leadership in your children's schools and even your own workplaces!

- *Lelly, Allison & Marilee*

# The Facts



The EPA has consistently ranked indoor air pollution among the top five environmental risks to public health.

Source: [EPA](#)



Poor school indoor air quality can trigger headaches, cause allergic reactions, aggravate asthma, and produce skin, eye, nose and throat irritation. These problems can impact students' attendance and reduce both teacher and student performance.

Source: [EPA](#)



We spend 90% of our time indoors, where concentrations can be 2-5x more polluted than outdoor air.

Source: [EPA](#), [Branch Basics](#)



Of the 3,163 chemicals behind the word "fragrance," many are associated with asthma, diabetes, obesity, autism, ADD/ADHD and hormone disruption.

Source: [EWG](#), [NCBI](#), [WebMD](#), [NRDC](#), [Branch Basics](#)



Millions of US children have been diagnosed with ADHD, which has been linked to pesticide exposure in children and prenatal exposure to phthalates (chemicals often found in soft plastics, synthetic fragranced products and conventional cleaning products).

Source: [CDC](#), [Harvard](#), [WebMD](#), [Cincinnati Childrens](#), [UNC](#)



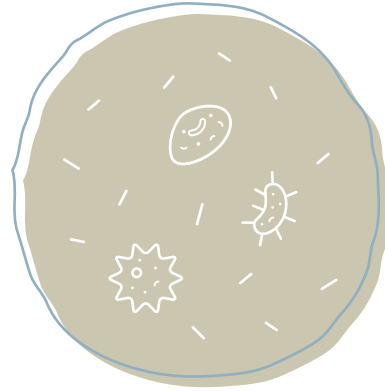
Nearly 1 in 13 school-aged children have asthma, the leading cause of school absenteeism due to chronic illness.

Source: [CDC](#), [EPA](#)

# Terrain vs. Germ Theory

In the mid 19th century, two well-known researchers investigated the possible cause of disease through the action of bacteria in the body.

Louis Pasteur is the scientist most associated with the Germ Theory of disease, which has been the basis for modern medicine. Simply put, his theory concludes germs are the problem and exposure to germs can lead to sickness and disease.



Antoine Béchamp, a contemporary of Pasteur, proposed Terrain Theory which concluded it was not the germ, but the body or the “terrain” that either succumbs to or repels viruses, bacteria, and other pathogens. If the terrain was dirty or congested it was the function of the bacteria to digest this material for excretion by the body.

Fast forward to the last decade and scientists have directly linked vulnerability to illness and the unprecedented rise in degenerative disease to our toxic body burden. This toxicity is a result of exposure to harmful chemicals in our everyday products, food, water, and air in our homes, schools and workplaces. In other words, our toxic environments make us sick.

According to Béchamp’s Terrain Theory, you can reduce your toxic body burden and your vulnerability to colds and flu by maintaining a healthy lifestyle and balanced diet. The healthier your body and stronger your immune system, the less likely you are to get sick.

*Furthermore, new scientific discoveries into the microbiome have also proven that not all germs are bad germs and that we actually benefit from exposure to certain types of bacteria, viruses, etc. to build a strong immune system.*

*How does this relate  
to cleaning supplies?  
Better air means  
better health!*



Indoor air quality impacts our health in more ways than we realize. We need to address the issue of poor air quality in our schools, homes and workplaces. In an article dated March 27, 2020 titled: "*Now Is the Time to Take Care of Your Lungs. Here's How.*" the New York Times states that increased exposure to chemicals/pollution in our outdoor and indoor air impacts our immune system and increases our susceptibility to infection. Right now, millions of well-meaning people are over-using the very chemical-based disinfectant cleaners that are polluting their indoor air and thus, compromising their health.

Bottom line: products with harmful chemicals that pollute our air are immune stressors and actually make us more vulnerable to disease and contagious illnesses.

# Cleaning vs. Disinfecting

There are two main categories of cleaning products: soap and water and sanitizers/disinfectants. These two product categories handle germs (eg. coronavirus, influenza, etc.) in different ways.

## *Soap*

- Removes germs
- Dismantles any pathogen with a lipid membrane including the coronavirus and certain bacteria

## *Sanitizers/ Disinfectants*

- Kills germs while leaving in place, including good bacteria
- Often contain toxic chemicals (e.g. EPA-registered pesticides)
- Can create resistant superbugs

We don't recommend the use of sanitizers/disinfectants with EPA-registered pesticides. If disinfecting is required, use a safer disinfectant (see below) and follow the CDC's two-step process.



# CDC's Two-Step Disinfecting Procedure



## *Step 1: Clean*

Spray surfaces with a fragrance-free soap solution or a natural cleaner like Branch Basics. This is an important step as dirt and grease interfere with the germ-killing abilities of sanitizers/disinfectants. [Here's how to find safer cleaners.](#)

## *Step 2: Disinfect*

Spray surfaces with a disinfectant. Make sure to account for dwell time by not wiping it off and letting it dry on the surface. As mentioned above, disinfectants can be harmful to your health so here are some safer, CDC-approved options:

- 3% Hydrogen Peroxide: Avoid using on surfaces that may bleach
- Alcohol: Solution with at least 70% alcohol\*
- Envirocleanse-A\*
- Benefect Botanical Disinfectant Wipes\*
- Force of Nature\*
- Dry Steam Cleaners: High heat dry steam cleaners are an EPA-approved, chemical-free option for disinfecting surfaces. The jet stream of vapor kills viruses, bacteria, dust mites, mold and mildew in 2-7 seconds.

\* Ideally use these products in the evenings or early morning (when students are not present)





# Helpful Resources



## *Air Quality and Cognition*

### Research Studies

- [\*New Research Links School Air Quality to School Cleaning Supplies\*](#)
- [\*The Impact of Green Buildings on Cognitive Function\*](#)
- [\*Associations of Cognitive Function Scores with Carbon Dioxide, Ventilation, and Volatile Organic Compound Exposures in Office Workers: A Controlled Exposure Study of Green and Conventional Office Environments\*](#)

### Articles

- [\*What Are the Trends in Indoor Air Quality and Their Effects on Human Health?\*](#)
- [\*Volatile Organic Compounds' Impact on Indoor Air Quality\*](#)
- [\*Now Is the Time to Take Care of Your Lungs. Here's How\*](#)
- [\*Breathing Differences Between Children and Adults\*](#)
- [\*Your Child's Environmental Health: How the Body Works: Differences Between Adults and Children\*](#)
- [\*Poor Indoor Air Quality May Dull Cognitive Abilities\*](#)
- [\*Air Pollution Causes 'Huge' Reduction in Intelligence, Study Reveals\*](#)
- [\*Teen Exposure to Air Pollution Could Reduce IQ Levels Long Term\*](#)

## *Cleaning Supplies and Children's Health*

### Research Studies

- [\*Cleaning at Home and at Work in Relation to Lung Function Decline and Airway Obstruction\*](#)
- [\*New Research Links School Air Quality to School Cleaning Supplies\*](#)
- [\*The Impact of Bisphenol A and Triclosan on Immune Parameters in the U.S. Population, NHANES 2003-2006\*](#)

### Articles

- [\*3,163 Ingredients Hide Behind the Word "Fragrance"\*](#)
- [\*An Epidemic of Inflammatory Conditions\*](#)
- [\*Household Cleaning Can Be as Bad as Smoking for Lung Function\*](#)
- [\*FDA Authority Over Cosmetics: How Cosmetics Are Not FDA-Approved, but Are FDA-Regulated\*](#)
- [\*Fragrances in Cleaning Products\*](#)
- [\*7 Chemicals Banned in Europe That Are Allowed in the USA\*](#)
- [\*Chemical Exposure Linked to Attention Deficit Disorder in Children\*](#)
- [\*Be Smart About School Cleaning Supplies\*](#)
- [\*Cleaning Supplies and Your Health\*](#)

## *Handwashing, Sanitizers and Disinfectants*

### Podcast

- [\*Covid-19 FAQ: Cleaner vs. Disinfectant\*](#) by Dr. Sarah Ballantyne @ThePaleoMom

### Video

- [\*The Disinfecting Dilemma\*](#)
- [\*How to Clean Household Surfaces with Soap and Water\*](#) with Dr. Sanjay Gupta

### Articles

- [\*Show Me the Science – When & How to Use Hand Sanitizer in Community Settings\*](#)
- [\*Hand-Washing: Do's and Don'ts\*](#)
- [\*Why Soap Works\*](#)
- [\*The Trouble With Disinfecting Wipes\*](#)
- [\*Could Household Disinfectants be Making our Children Fat?\*](#)

## *Asthma & Allergies*

### Research Studies

- [\*Hazardous Chemical Releases Occurring in School Settings, 14 States, 2008–2013\*](#)
- [\*Reducing Hazardous Cleaning Product Use: A Collaborative Effort\*](#)
- [\*Professional Cleaning and Asthma\*](#)

### Articles

- [\*Managing Asthma in the School Environment\*](#)
- [\*How Does Indoor Air Quality in Schools Affect Asthma?\*](#)
- [\*Children's Vulnerability To Toxic Chemicals: A Challenge And Opportunity To Strengthen Health And Environmental Policy\*](#)

## *Resources from Branch Basics*

- [\*2 Things Parents Can Do To Dramatically Improve School Air Quality\*](#)
- [\*How to Educate Schools on Safer Cleaning \(without sounding crazy\)\*](#)
- [\*Does Branch Basics Kill Germs?\*](#)
- [\*Is Branch Basics a Sanitizer or a Disinfectant?\*](#)
- [\*How to Naturally Disinfect Surfaces\*](#)
- [\*Why Over-Sanitizing Does More Harm Than Good\*](#)
- [\*Why We're Not Disinfecting Our Homes \(even now!\)\*](#)
- [\*Home Cleanse Guide: How to Detox Your Home\*](#)
- [\*The Branch Basics Smart Guide to Safe School Supplies\*](#)

# Email Template



## *Starting the Conversation*

Sometimes the most daunting part of getting a school to switch cleaning products is simply starting the conversation. So we wrote an email template to hopefully make it a little easier for you! You can edit and adjust to best fit your specific situation and the personalities involved. If you have any examples of children or staff experiencing symptoms related to exposure to the cleaners or disinfectants used, we recommend including those. It can also be helpful to note that your child is sensitive to harsh chemicals and fragrances.

We have found that in larger school districts, the best person to contact first is the Maintenance & Operation Director. This will vary by school, so if you are unsure you can start by inquiring with the School Director or Principal.

*Hi* \_\_\_\_\_ ,

I hope you're doing well.

I'm reaching out in hopes to discuss the cleaning procedures at school. I know that you are going above and beyond to try to keep all the children and staff safe, and I appreciate all of your efforts! I would like to know more about which specific cleaning and disinfectant products are being used, as well as the soaps and sanitizers for hand washing. Sadly, many of the cleaning and sanitizing chemicals themselves can cause more harm than good (especially regarding the immune system, lungs, and brain), so I want to work with you to make sure all the products are non-toxic while also meeting efficacy standards and requirements.

Research shows that harsh disinfectants and sanitizers with EPA-registered pesticides and other toxic chemicals can actually put our health at risk and make us more vulnerable to contagious disease. I know that's the last thing we all want, and thankfully they're not necessary to germ-proof the school! In fact, they often lead to antibiotic resistant superbugs, making it more and more difficult to kill germs as time goes on, and they kill both the good and bad bacteria. As you may know, it's actually beneficial for kids (and adults) to be exposed to some bacteria since our microbiomes rely on a diverse mix of bacteria strains to keep us strong and healthy.

The fact that most chemical cleaners contain ingredients linked to cancers, autoimmune disease, inflammatory disease, impaired development, hormonal imbalances, asthma, allergies, headaches, and other health concerns, makes me really passionate about wanting to help make sure the products that are used at the school are safe.

I've attached some resources you can take a look at, as well as a list of safe cleaning options, all CDC & EPA approved. I am also happy to help in any way I can to make the switch as seamless as possible.

I look forward to hearing back from you. Thank you so much for your dedication to creating a truly safe environment, especially for our little ones!

Sincerely,

# Supportive Strategies

## *Team up with like-minded parents*

There is strength (and support!) in numbers. Talk to other parents at your school so that you can all work together for change.

## *Avoid fear-based tactics*

Avoid fear as much as possible and focus on the benefits of making the switch: healthier lungs, stronger immunity, better learning, etc. Remember, while we may see using conventional sanitizers and disinfectants as dangerous, many other people see it as an essential way to prevent the spread of disease in schools.

## *Make it easy for them to say yes*

- Crunch the numbers to show them how healthy cleaning can fit into the budget
- Provide the first batch of safe cleaners so they can do a test-run
- Present the scientific literature on how harmful cleaning chemicals are to childrens' health
  - [\*Resources for Educating Schools on Safer Cleaning\*](#)

## *Bring in an expert*

Like your child's doctor, naturopath, or healthy home expert to help you present the facts and make a strong case.

## *Try getting the teacher on board*

If the school needs more time to make changes, see if you can get your child's teacher on board:

- Gift teacher Branch Basics and/or a safer CDC approved disinfectant (list above)

## *Go directly to the Janitorial Service*

If educators and administrators are too overwhelmed by tasks and responsibilities, try going directly to the janitorial service to see if you can get them to add your preferred non-toxic cleaners to their list of services.

## *Be politely persistent*

Above all, remember to be polite even when you hit roadblocks. It may take time to see the change you want, but every little win is worth it!

# Words of Encouragement



*“As parents, we have a significant responsibility to advocate for safe and sustainable products that won’t be harmful to humans or the ecosystem. Effective cleaning and disinfecting will be crucial this coming school year for the overall health and wellbeing of both children and staff. It is imperative that parents appeal for less toxic ways to accomplish these goals and this toolkit by Branch Basics is an excellent guide to facilitate change.”*

Amy Ziff, Founder of MADE SAFE®

*“Our regulatory system fails to protect our children from exposure to harmful toxins, this is why as parents we must do everything we can. This toolkit provides simple steps you can take to protect your children, teachers and staff! From in the classroom to out on the field we have you covered! Non-Toxic Neighborhoods and our advisors believe that it should be a basic human right that our children are protected from harmful and synthetic chemicals where they live, learn and play! “*

Kim Konte, Founder of Non-Toxic Neighborhoods

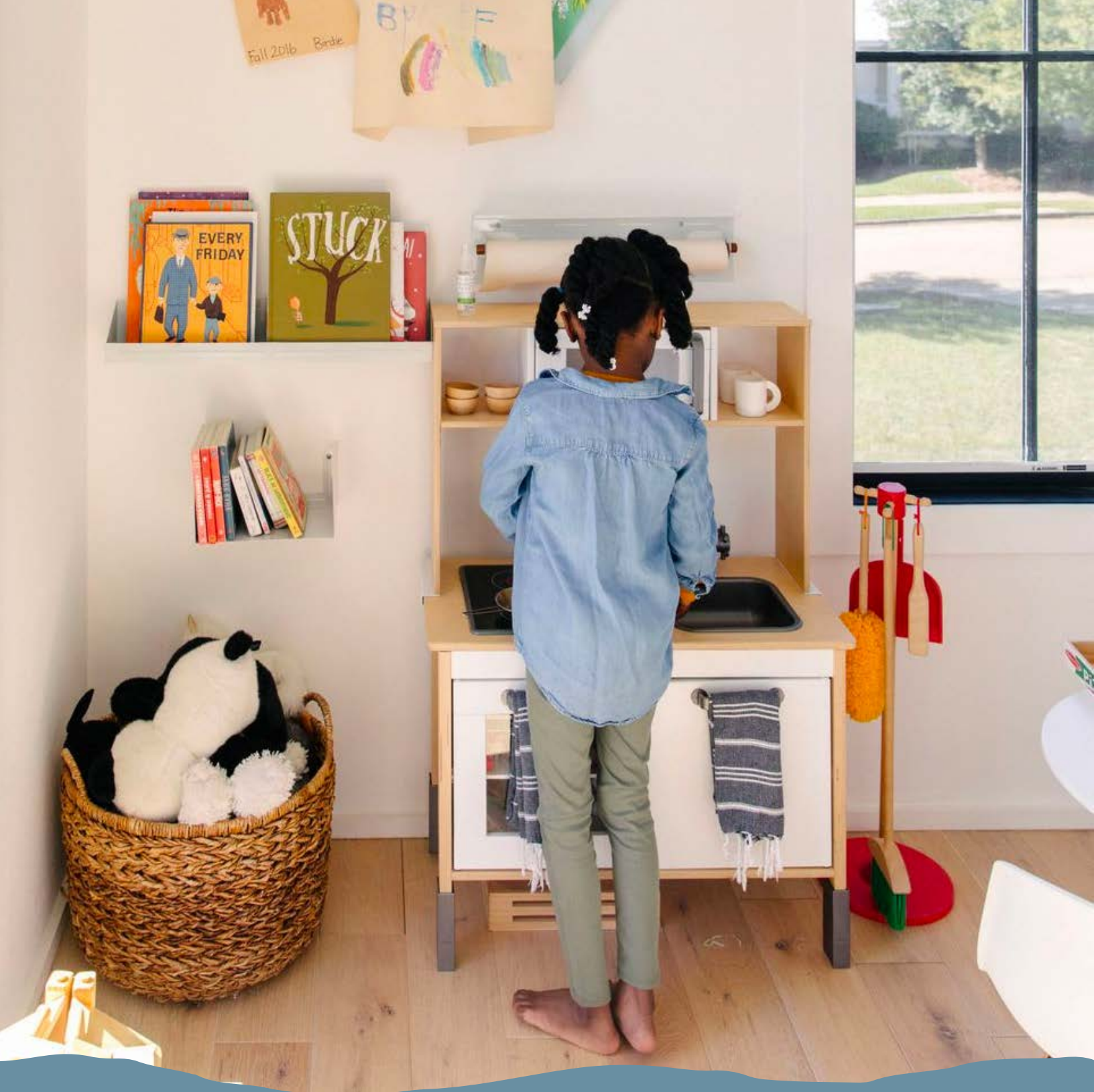


*“Pregnant women, infants and young children are exquisitely vulnerable to toxic chemicals in their environments. Even extremely low-dose exposures during these vulnerable periods in early life can result in lasting damage. This is why it is so important to protect the most sensitive among us. By protecting them, we preserve the health of all.”*

Non-Toxic Neighborhood’s Advisor Phil Landrigan MD, MSc, FAAP



We are here to support you! If you have any questions, don’t hesitate to reach out to us at [info@branchbasics.com](mailto:info@branchbasics.com).



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