

Avoid Poisonings: Five COVID-19 Safety and Cleaning Tips



“My 2-year-old licked some hand sanitizer. Should I be worried?”

“I mixed bleach with vinegar and now I’m having a hard time breathing. Will I be okay?”

“I got disinfectant on my food. Is it safe to eat?”

The poison center gets calls like this every day—and they have been increasing with more people staying at home and spending extra time cleaning and disinfecting during the COVID-19 pandemic. From January to March 2020, poison centers nationwide saw a 20% increase in calls related to cleaning products and disinfectants compared to the same months in 2019.

This included an increase in calls about young children, as well as an even bigger increase in calls concerning adults. Bleach, nonalcoholic disinfectants and hand sanitizers were among the products with the biggest increases.

Here are some key safety steps for cleaning at home.

Clean Safely

Follow the directions on the product label

- Read and carefully follow the directions on the label every time you use a cleaning product.
- Use products only for the reasons listed on the label.
 - Do not use bleach, disinfectants sprays or wipes on skin. This can cause skin irritation.
 - Do not drink bleach or other cleaning products or disinfectants. These products are meant for cleaning the surfaces in your home and are not safe to put in your body.
- Remember that products that are made for commercial use are usually stronger. They can be especially harmful if you use them in the wrong way.

Don't mix cleaning products

- Do not use multiple cleaners together unless the label tells you to. Mixing products, such as mixing bleach with vinegar or ammonia, can create irritating and possibly harmful fumes, like chlorine or chloramine gas.

Wear protective gear

- Many products recommend wearing disposable gloves when cleaning and disinfecting. Check the label for information on appropriate gear.

Use in a well-ventilated area

- Many products recommend opening windows or doors to have plenty of ventilation while cleaning, especially with bleach.
- Some products recommend that you keep children and pets away from the cleaned surface for a certain amount of time. Be sure to check the label for this information.

Store cleaning products out of reach of children

- Put products away as soon as you get home from the store, and put them away immediately after using them every time.
- Keep all cleaning products and disinfectants up high and out of reach of children and pets
- Store products in their original containers. Make sure the tops are on tight and that spray bottle nozzles are turned to the off position.
- If you make your own cleaning products at home, be sure to clearly label the container.

The [Northern New England Poison Center](#) is here to help 24/7, whether someone has gotten a cleaner in their mouth or on their skin, or if you have questions about product safety. Call [1-800-222-1222](tel:1-800-222-1222), chat with us at www.nnepc.org, or text POISON to 85511. Store our number in your phone—you never know when you will need it.