

# local news

## ▶ READ THE LABELS

# The real dirt about using disinfectants

Consumers today are constantly bombarded with a barrage of cleaning products claiming to kill, arrest or destroy germs. Words like "dual-action" or "extra-strength" are used, or product labels claim

to have a proprietary blend which makes the cleaner unique.

Many of us simply look for words like "disinfectant" or "antibacterial" or something that assures us that the product will eliminate germs.

But if we were to actually read the label—and ask a chemist to translate the intimidating words—we might find some alarming ingredients that can damage more than just the germs.

are continually exposed to germs, what do we actually require to rid ourselves of them? Do we need sanitizers, sterilizers, disinfectants, antibacterial agents or antiseptics to get the job done?

What is the threshold where we can deem ourselves and our families safe? This week we will expose the "dirt on disinfectants," discover what they are all about, and recommend some eco-friendly alternatives.

Dictionary.com can help us decipher what the definition of a disinfectant is: "An agent, such as heat, radiation, or a chemical, that destroys, neutralizes, or inhibits the growth of disease-carrying microorganisms."

So we know that a disinfectant's chief aim is to destroy and kill the unwelcome guest.

A household cleaner that accomplishes the above sounds good in theory, but we need to consider the chemicals that we are allowing into our homes in accomplishing that task.

Some of the most common chemicals found in disinfectants are sodium hydroxide, sodium hypochlorite (bleach) and phosphoric acid—which, according to the American Federal Center for Disease Control, are known to burn skin and eyes, corrode metal surfaces, pollute indoor air quality and are highly toxic to the environment.

Other common offenders are phenols which damage DNA, the kidneys, liver and nervous system, formaldehyde, a known carcinogen; and last, but not least, chlorine which is a lung irritant and an environmental pollutant.

Now that we have exposed some of those hideous chemicals, are they in your products at home? If so, consider some alternatives.

Disinfectant cleaners are relatively new and are widely believed to be the only effective household weapon against germs.

This is untrue. Old fashioned scrubbing coupled with some household ingredients can help eradicate germs and safely clean your home without disinfectants, but with disinfectant-like properties.

Some of the more susceptible areas and hosts to germs at home are kitchen surfaces, doorknobs, sponges, keyboards, toilets and garbage cans.

To help clean those areas efficiently, mix borax (which can be found in most grocery stores), vinegar (its acidity inhibits microbial growth), hot water and castile soap (made from vegetable oil) to make a very sterilizing concoction.

Vinegar and baking soda can easily rid your house of unwanted smells and stains. Tea tree, eucalyptus and citrus oils possess disinfecting properties that not only clean but are pleasing to the senses.

SEE DISINFECTANTS ON A21

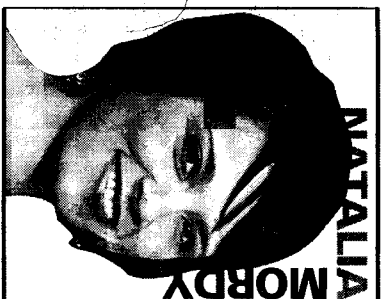
# Clean germ fighting

DISINFECTANTS FROM A20

Hot water and steam are simple, yet effective germ eradicators.

The fight against germs is won by the frequency and thoroughness of cleaning, not by disinfectants alone. Happy cleaning!

Natalia Mordy is an eco-friendly lifestyles activist, working through her company, *Inmaculate Interiors Eco-Friendly Cleaning*, 808-7774. Please write in with your eco questions to [serve@inmaculateinteriors.ca](mailto:serve@inmaculateinteriors.ca) or visit her web site: [www.inmaculateinteriors.ca](http://www.inmaculateinteriors.ca)



Eco-friendly Lifestyles