

# Cleaning Matters

Tips and Trends from The Soap and Detergent Association

May/June 2007

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## Calendar of Clean

### May is ...

- **Mother's Day: May 13**  
(See *Ask Nancy!* article)
- **Asthma and Allergy Awareness Month**  
(See *Don't Let Asthma Hold You Back* article)
- **National Bike Month**  
(See *Bike Riding Brings Benefits* article)

### June is ...

- **National Cancer Survivors Day: June 3**  
(See *Food Safety for People with Cancer* article)
- **Home Safety Month**  
(See *News Flash!* and *Clean Ideas* articles)
- **Father's Day: June 17**
- **First Day of Summer: June 21**  
(See *Hidden Germs* article)

## Don't Let Asthma Hold You Back

*Spring cleaning tips for controlling household allergens*

What do singer Billy Joel, marathon runner Alberto Salazar, actress Sharon Stone and political activist Rev. Jesse Jackson have in common? They are all people who didn't let asthma stop them from achieving success in their chosen fields. And if you or a loved one suffers from asthma, it shouldn't hold you back either!

Asthma attacks are triggered by tiny airborne particles called allergens. These allergens lurk in dust mites, animal dander, cockroaches and their droppings, mold and mildew, and pollen. So with the spring cleaning season upon us, there's no better time than now to concentrate on cleaning practices that can reduce the amount of allergens in the home, declares Nancy Bock, Vice President of Education at The Soap and Detergent Association.

## Clear Out the Clutter

When it comes to clutter, "collecting dust" is no idle phrase. Having lots of stuff around – like piles of mail, stacks of paper grocery bags, newspapers and knick knacks – provides welcoming places for dust and its allergens to accumulate and for mold, mildew and cockroaches to live and grow.

- **Keep small items, like CDs, tapes, DVDs, books, figurines and stuffed animals, in enclosed storage containers, drawers or closed cabinets.**
- **Toss old newspapers and magazines.** Set a limit: one week for newspapers; three months for magazines. If you hold them longer for recycling, get a closed storage container or move them to the garage.

*more*



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## Don't Let Asthma Hold You Back (cont'd)

- **Get rid of that under-cabinet stash of grocery bags.** Insects love to live in them, crawl through them, and leave allergens behind. If they're damp, mold grows in them, too.
- **Choose lightweight, washable curtains** instead of heavy draperies.
- **When buying furniture, consider hard or smooth, easily-cleaned surfaces (wood, vinyl, leather or laminate) instead of upholstery.** In the bedroom, omit unnecessary fabric surfaces, such as upholstered headboards, bed canopies, dust ruffles, and throw pillows.

### Delete the Dust

Regular dusting and vacuuming, along with some wise decorating choices, can help control the dust mite population.

- **Dust furniture regularly using a furniture dusting product.** Dusting with a dry cloth just spreads the dust around.
- **Vacuum and wet-mop floors weekly.** Use an upright vacuum or a canister style with a power nozzle – they pick up two to six times as much dust from a rug as canisters without a power nozzle.
- **Use special dust mite-proof covers,** sometimes called “allergy impermeable” covers, to keep dust from going through pillows and mattresses. Wipe covers with a damp cloth every week.
- **Avoid wall-to-wall carpeting, especially in bedrooms.** Instead, use small, washable rugs and launder them weekly. If you can't avoid carpeting, choose a short, tight weave to minimize dust accumulation and make cleaning easier.

### Rub Out the Mildew

Moist, humid surfaces are the climate of choice for mold and mildew. Look for and eliminate sources of excess moisture, including leaks and high indoor humidity.

- **Use the exhaust fan** when bathing, showering or cooking.
- **Keep the areas around faucets and handles and under sinks clean and dry.**
- **Use a nonabrasive, all-purpose or antibacterial cleaner** on shower stalls and bathtubs. Check for soap scum; if necessary, use a soap scum remover.
- **Shower curtains are a favorite breeding ground for mold/mildew.** Most shower curtains can be laundered using detergent and liquid household bleach. Check the care label on fabric shower curtains. For vinyl ones, scrub heavily mildewed areas with liquid bleach or mildew remover before laundering.

## Hidden Germs

### *Everyday places where germs hide out*

Even in the cleanest of homes, there are unexpected places where germs hide out. Some of these hiding places may even be the result of well-intentioned cleaning practices! Nancy Bock, Vice President of Education at The Soap and Detergent Association, has some suggestions for spotting germs that have gone undercover.

**Sponges.** You mop up a spill with a sponge, rinse it out, and set it next to the sink to dry. Or you keep using the same sponge over and over to clean dirty pots and pans. Sponges should be washed and disinfected regularly. One way is to soak them for five minutes in a solution of  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup of chlorine bleach and 1 gallon of water. Rinse and air-dry.

An even easier solution is to run them through the dishwasher. Rotate your sponges so that as soon as the dishwasher is emptied, you can tuck a dirty sponge into the silverware basket where it's ready and waiting to be cleaned. If you don't have a silverware basket, a small, plastic dishwasher basket (the type that's sold for cleaning children's cups, toys, and utensils) is an ideal alternative.

**Hand-held vacuum cleaners.** That handy little vacuum that's great for quick crumb pickup can be a nesting place for germs if you leave food particles sitting in the bag. When you're finished cleaning up, open the vacuum, remove the dirt receptacle and dump the crumbs in the trash. Brush off the filter to remove any additional food particles.

## Hidden Germs (cont'd)

**Sink overflow.** Bathroom sinks usually have small drainage holes located near the rim. If the sink is overfilled, the water drains into these holes and through a small passageway into the trap. Smelly, sludge-like material can build up in this passageway. To clean, mix a solution of liquid detergent and very

hot water and pour it down the overflow holes. If you can see the sludge, loosen it with a stiff brush, and then rinse it away. If a musty smell persists, mix a solution of 1 cup of chlorine bleach with 1 gallon of water and pour it through the holes. Rinse thoroughly with plain water.

## News Flash

### Clean & Safe: New Partnership with Consumer Information Center

*Get the facts about using household cleaning products effectively and safely*

There's no doubt about it. Today's household cleaning products not only make life a lot easier; they make it a lot healthier, too. Whatever the cleaning challenge, you can probably find a product that's perfectly suited to getting the job done right. Plus, medical experts agree that cleanliness practices – such as regular handwashing and surface cleaning – are crucial in reducing the spread of infectious diseases.

But cleaning and killing germs are serious business. So, it's important to understand the proper use of products – and to always use them with safety in mind. This is of particular concern to parents, child care providers, or anyone with adventurous children around!

All the information you need is available in "*Clean & Safe*," a publication from The Soap and Detergent Association. It provides you with what you need to know to accomplish your cleaning and disinfecting tasks with success and with care: from becoming a savvy label-reader to safely stocking your cleaning supplies' closet . . . from choosing the right product for the task to knowing what to do if an unintentional poisoning occurs.

This publication can be downloaded from the Federal Citizen Information Center (FCIC)'s web site, [www.pueblo.gsa.gov](http://www.pueblo.gsa.gov). The FCIC web site includes the Consumer Information Catalog, which lists titles, descriptions and ordering information for the more than 200 free and low-cost publications, including "*Clean & Safe*," that are distributed from Pueblo, Colorado. Revised and published quarterly, the catalog brings together publications from more than 40 agencies, providing the public with one convenient source for Federal consumer information. Consumers can get a free catalog by requesting one online or by calling the FCIC toll-free number: 1-888-8-PUEBLO (1-888-878-3256).

The FCIC is a trusted, one-stop source for answers to questions about Federal agencies, programs and services. The specially-trained staff can answer questions in English and Spanish about all aspects of the Federal government or direct callers to an appropriate contact. The public can access the call center by calling toll-free 1 (800) 688-9889 (TTY 800-326-2996) between 9 a.m. and 8 p.m. EDT.

The FCIC maintains close ties with more than 100 different Federal offices, agencies and departments, as well as many consumer and trade organizations, including The Soap and Detergent Association.

## Bike Riding Brings Benefits

*But don't let germs come along for the ride*

The League of American Bicyclists has declared the month of May National Bike Month. The goal is to encourage Americans to trade in their usual four-wheel mode of transportation for a two-wheel one – whether it's for a short errand . . . or a leisurely afternoon of recreation . . . or a healthier way to get to work. And it's a hobby that the whole family can enjoy.

Biking, like any outdoor activity, means that hands come in contact with dirt and grime. And, as with any physical activity, hands often become warm and moist, providing the perfect place for germs to live.

If you're stopping for a snack along the road, hand sanitizers and hand wipes are easy, convenient and portable, says Nancy Bock, Vice President of Education at The Soap and Detergent Association.

They're the ideal companions when soap and water aren't easily available.

When soap and water *are* available – or when you return back home – here's how to clean those hands.

1. Wet hands with warm, running water. Then apply soap.
2. Rub hands together vigorously to make a lather and scrub all surfaces. Continue for 20 seconds, which is about how long it takes to sing "Happy Birthday" twice through.
3. Rinse well under warm, running water.
4. Dry hands thoroughly using paper towels or an air dryer. If possible, use paper towels to turn off the faucet.

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## Food Safety for People with Cancer

*Practice safe food-handling to avoid extra stress on the immune system*

Food safety is important for everyone . . . but for those diagnosed with cancer, it is of particular concern. That's because cancer and its treatments can weaken the immune system, which makes the patient more susceptible to many types of infections. The list of possible infections includes those brought on by disease-causing bacteria and other pathogens that cause foodborne illnesses.

To help avoid contracting a foodborne illness, both cancer patients and their caregivers must be especially vigilant when handling, preparing, and consuming food. Nancy Bock, Vice President of Education at The Soap and Detergent Association, offers some basic steps to food safety.

- **Clean:** Wash hands and food preparation surfaces often.
- **Separate:** Keep raw meat, poultry, seafood, and eggs away from other foods in the shopping cart, grocery bags, refrigerator, and on preparation surfaces.

- **Cook:** Use a food thermometer to ensure that all foods are cooked or reheated to the proper temperature.
- **Chill:** Refrigerate or freeze meat, poultry, eggs, seafood, and other perishables within two hours of cooking or purchasing – within one hour if the temperature outside is above 90° F.

For additional information about food safety for cancer patients, the publication "*Food Safety for People with Cancer*" can be downloaded in PDF format by visiting [www.fsis.usda.gov/PDF/Food\\_Safety\\_for\\_People\\_with\\_Cancer.pdf](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/PDF/Food_Safety_for_People_with_Cancer.pdf)

Cleaning Questions? *Ask Nancy!*

**Q: How do I tell if it's safe to use chlorine bleach on an item if the care label has gone missing?**

**A:** Mix 1 tablespoon of chlorine bleach with ¼ cup of water. Using an eye dropper or a cotton swab, dab one drop of this solution on a hidden part of the fabric, such as a seam allowance or the inside of a hem or cuff. Wait one minute and then blot dry with a paper towel. Be sure to test all colors and any decorative trim. If there are no color changes, then you know it's safe to use chlorine bleach.

**Q: Because lilies are my mother's favorite flowers, we always give them to her on Mother's Day. More than once, pollen stains have been a problem. How do we get them out?**

**A:** Resist the urge to brush the pollen off with your hands. Not only do you run the risk of rubbing the pollen into the fabric, but there's also the chance that the oil from your hands may set the stain. Instead, gently shake or vacuum the fabric to remove as much pollen as possible. Use the sticky side of a piece of tape to carefully lift off any remaining loose particles. Pretreat with a prewash stain remover and launder in the hottest water that's safe for the fabric. If the stain remains, launder again, using chlorine bleach, if safe for the fabric, or oxygen bleach.

*Nancy Bock is Vice President of Education at The Soap and Detergent Association*

## Clean Ideas

### Keeping Your Home Clean and Safe

#### *Tips for creating a safer home*

The Home Safety Council (HSC) is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to preventing home-related injuries that result in nearly 20,000 deaths and 21 million medical visits on average each year. June is Home Safety Month and this year's campaign theme – Hands on Home Safety – asks the public to take some simple hands-on steps to create a safer home environment from such leading hazards as falls, fires and burns, and poisonings. Here are a few suggestions, courtesy of The Home Safety Council and The Soap and Detergent Association.

1. **Keep stairs and pathways clear of clutter.**
2. **Promptly wipe up spills** and splashed bathwater.
3. **Test the temperature of your hot water.** If it is higher than 120° F, turn down the water heater dial.
4. **Keep all household products in their original packages.** Packaging includes useful first aid information in the event of accidental exposure or ingestion.
5. **Keep all medicines, including vitamins, in their original, childproof containers** and store them high up out of children's reach. Discard all medications and prescriptions that have expired.
6. **Install child-safe locks** on cabinets that house cleaning supplies and medicines. Never assume a cabinet is too high for a curious, climbing toddler.
7. **Check all smoke alarms to make sure they are in working order.**
8. **Don't leave cleaning buckets unattended.** Even those with a small amount of liquid pose a danger to "top heavy" toddlers. If the child falls into a bucket, it may not tip over and he or she could drown. Even the water in the toilet can be a hazard to toddlers, so make sure all family members remember to close the lid.
9. **Place throw rugs over a rug-liner or choose rugs with non-skid backs** to reduce your chance of falling.
10. **Post the Poison Control Center phone number (1-800-222-1222)** by every land phone in your home and save it on your cell phone.