

Update 8

EFFECT OF ANTIBACTERIAL HOME CLEANING PRODUCTS ON INFECTIOUS DISEASE SYMPTOMS

In recent years, the availability of household cleaning products containing antibacterial ingredients has increased. Although manufacturers claim that these products offer health benefits, evidence linking the use of antibacterial products to better health has been lacking.

A new study attempted to find out whether people who live in households that use antibacterial cleaning products have fewer infections than people who live in households that use cleaning products without antibacterial ingredients.

238 households in an inner-city neighbourhood of Manhattan that had at least one preschool-age child living in the house.

The researchers assigned each household to use either antibacterial or regular products for general cleaning, laundry, and handwashing for 1 year. Each household was provided with a free supply of the assigned type of cleaning products. The researchers collected information on cleaning practices and infectious disease symptoms by weekly telephone calls, monthly visits, and extensive interviews every 3 months. The symptoms they asked about were fever, runny nose, sore throat, cough, vomiting, diarrhoea, skin rashes, and red eyes in any family member. They then compared the number of months that one or more family members had infectious disease symptoms in each group of households.

The most commonly reported symptoms were cough and runny nose, then sore throat and fever, then vomiting and diarrhoea, and finally rashes or eye symptoms. No differences were reported in symptoms between households that used antibacterial products and those that did not.

The study had some limitations. For example, the reports of infectious disease symptoms were from patient reports. It is possible that people were not accurate in reporting their symptoms. In addition, the study may not have been large enough to detect small differences in infectious symptoms between the 2 groups.

Overall the findings of the study suggest that antibacterial household cleaning products do not appear to reduce the number of infections among household residents.

Reference:

1.) Larson EL, Lin SX, Gomez-Pichardo C, Della-Latta P. Effect of antibacterial home cleaning and handwashing products on infectious disease symptoms: a randomized, double-blind trial. *Ann Intern Med.* 2004;140:321-9.