
Antibacterial soaps

Will they keep you healthy?

Antibacterial products — soaps, toothpastes, mouth washes, shaving creams, deodorants, shampoos, cleaning supplies, and laundry detergent — are advertised everywhere these days.

Antibacterial compounds are even being used to produce an increasing number of consumer products, such as toilet seats, kitchen utensils, trash bags, children's toys, and even socks and underwear!

But are these products really new, improved, and better for you? Do they keep you healthy?

Antibacterial products don't kill viruses

About 75 percent of liquid soaps and 30 percent of bar soaps contain antibacterial chemicals, the most common of which is triclosan.

However, studies have shown that antibacterial products don't kill viruses, which cause some of the most common illnesses, such as colds and the flu.

So antibacterial products are not going to keep you from catching the sniffles.

Are antibacterial soaps better for hand washing?

Keeping your hands clean is one of the most important steps you can take to avoid getting sick and spreading germs to others.

However, there is currently no evidence that using antibacterial soap provides a health benefit over plain soap.

Studies have shown that plain soaps are just as effective as antibacterial soaps with triclosan in preventing illness and removing bacteria from the hands.

So you don't need special soap — washing your hands with good, old-fashioned soap is just as effective. You just need good hand washing habits to keep you healthy.

Note: Antibacterial soaps are not the same as hand sanitizers, which are typically alcohol-based. According to the CDC, hand sanitizers with alcohol (isopropanol, ethanol, or n-propanol) are an acceptable alternative when plain soap and water are not available.

Should antibacterial products ever be used?

Spending extra money on unnecessary antibacterial products is a good reason to stop using them. Another reason is that some health experts worry that when antibiotics are overused or used when not needed,

bacteria may become more resistant to antibiotics.

Antibacterial cleaning products do have their place — in operating rooms, newborn nurseries, and hospital laboratories — where it's crucially important to keep bacteria in check. But you don't need to use antibacterial soaps and other products in your home.

More information

Get smart: Know when antibiotics work [↗](#)

Triclosan: What consumers should know [↗](#)

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Additional Kaiser Permanente reviewers

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