

## The Antibacterial Soap Controversy

New studies report that the antibacterial agent in soap available to the public is TOO LOW to kill serious germs like E. coli—they are no more effective than regular soap.

However, the daily use of antibacterial soaps and cleansers by generally healthy people brings up four major health concerns:

- Balance: We all know that there are good germs and bad germs. The “good” germs keep the “bad” germs from growing too strong and making us sick. Health officials and researchers are concerned that by using antibacterial products every day, we will kill off too many of the good bacteria, which can usually be killed more easily, and the bad bacteria will grow in larger numbers.
- Resistance: Scientists are afraid that by exposing bacteria to these antibacterial chemicals regularly, over time the germs will grow resistant to them. Then the antibacterials will have no effect on the germs.
- Exposure to chemicals: Pediatricians are concerned about exposing children to high levels of chemicals from an early age. Antibacterial chemicals are being added to toys, high chair trays, and other items in close contact with babies every day. No one knows the long-term effects of this exposure.
- Decreased wash time: Handwashing studies show that when people use antibacterial soap they wash for a shorter time because they think the chemical kills the germs faster. The antibacterial chemicals in cleansers kills bacteria in the same amount of time as other chemicals such as bleach—10 minutes when left on a surface. When antibacterial soap is used to wash your hands for 30 seconds, the benefit is questionable.

Antibacterial cleansers may have some benefit for people with suppressed immune systems or chronic illnesses. Hospitals or other areas with high levels of infectious diseases use stronger antibacterial soap. But for regular home use by healthy people, you need to decide for yourself if the possible benefit outweighs the dangers. Researchers disagree on whether to recommend that we use or not use these products. But they do agree on the importance of washing your hands—thoroughly and frequently.

To read further about antibacterial soaps, check out these web sites:

The Dirt on Antibacterial Soaps

<http://www.healthatoz.com/healthatoz/Atoz/common/standard/transform.jsp?requestURI=/healthatoz/Atoz/news/hs607437.jsp>

The Clean Hands Campaign—See which city has the cleanest hands

<http://www.washup.org/page03.htm>