Cleaning to Control Allergies & Asthma

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Cleaning to Control ALLERGIES and ASTHMA

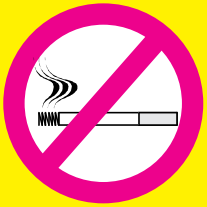
If you or your child have allergies or asthma, you already know that many things can bring on, or *"trigger,"* an asthma *flare* or *episode*. Some things that trigger asthma attacks are called *allergens*. Some people get symptoms from only one allergen — like dust mites. For other people, more than one kind of allergen can trigger an episode.

The most common allergens are:

animal dander

cockroaches

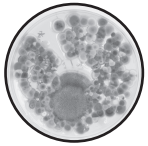
dust mites



Tobacco smoke is an asthma trigger.

Avoid smoking in a home where a person with asthma lives.

Cleaning



mold/mildew

pollen

Cleaning can help control these allergens. It's one of the easiest steps you can take to help reduce allergy or asthma flares (episodes).

Start with an Allergen-Control Plan

1

Work with your regular doctor or clinic to figure out which allergens affect your child or you the most.

If asthma flares happen a lot, you may need to see a doctor. He or she may suggest that you make changes in your household furnishings — like removing carpeting from a sleeping area.

2

Concentrate on controlling those allergens.

3

Start with the easiest, least expensive ways, like cleaning.

Set up your cleaning plan one room at a time, beginning with where the allergy-sufferer sleeps. For example:

- wash bedding and curtains
- dust and vacuum
- clean window sills and frames
- wet mop floors

TIPS:

- Ask your doctor or clinic for asthma education information.
- Join an asthma support group.
- Keep an asthma diary.

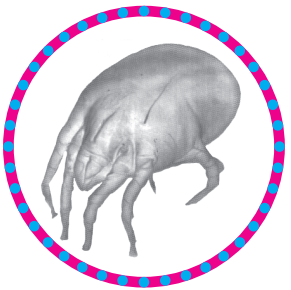
Allergen-Control Plan

The next pages give suggestions for cleaning places where allergens grow or collect. Clean as often as possible — do the best you can.

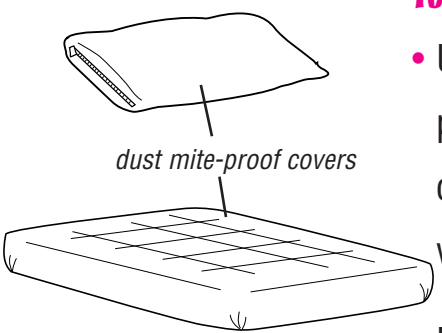
Bedroom

Dust mites in the bedroom are a trigger for people with allergies and asthma. Every home has dust mites. You can't see them; they feed on invisible skin flakes in pillows, bedding, upholstery and carpeting. You can control them by keeping bedding clean and by controlling dust.

warmth + moisture + skin =



dust mites

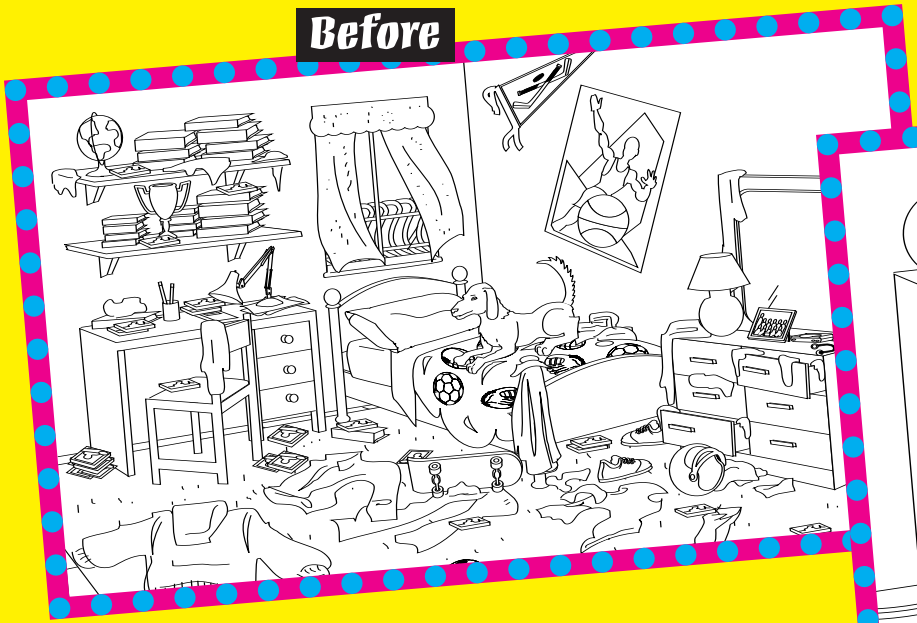


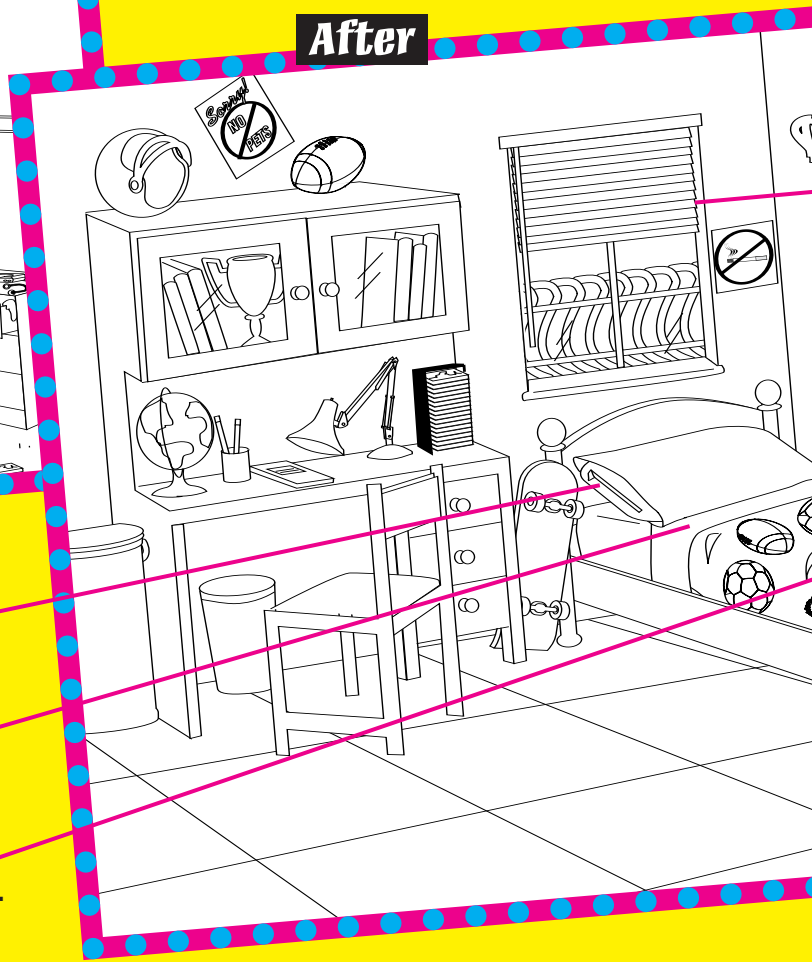
To Control Dust Mites in the Bedroom

- Use special dust mite-proof covers to keep dust mites from going through pillows and mattresses. They're sometimes called "allergen-impermeable" covers. Wipe covers with a damp cloth every week. If you don't use covers, wash pillows at least 4 times a year, and replace them every year.
- Don't use carpet in the bedroom. Use linoleum®, vinyl or wood flooring and washable area rugs. Wash rugs once a week.

Wash Bedding to Control Dust Mites

What	How Often	Wash	Dry
Sheets	Weekly	Use a regular wash cycle and warm or hot water. Washing removes dust mite allergens and some dust mites.	When possible, dry in a hot dryer to kill dust mites. Hanging sheets outside to dry attracts dust and pollen.
Pillows	At least 4 times a year (unless you use dust mite-proof covers)	Wash two pillows at a time on a gentle cycle.	Dry pillows in the dryer. Take them out halfway through and fluff them so they don't get lumpy.
Blankets, Comforters, Mattress Pads	At least monthly	Use a gentle wash cycle.	Dry in the dryer; stop to fluff a few times. Add a wet towel to help them dry evenly.



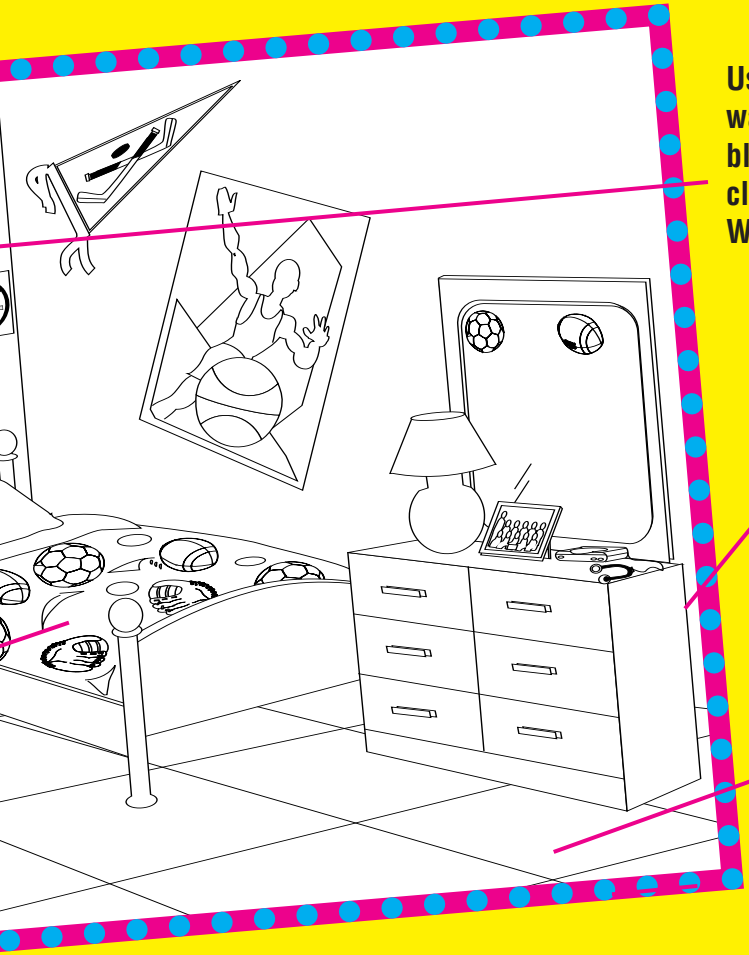


Use special dust mite-proof pillows and mattress covers. Wipe them off weekly with a clean, damp cloth.

Wash sheets weekly.

Wash blankets and bedspreads monthly.

Bedroom



Use smooth blinds or washable curtains. Wipe blinds weekly with a clean, damp cloth. Wash curtains monthly.

Dust furniture weekly, using a dusting product or a special cloth that attracts dust (a dry cloth spreads dust around).

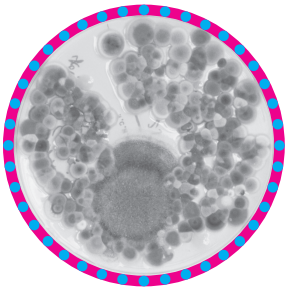
Vacuum (see page 19) and wet mop floors weekly.

- Keep closet doors closed.
- Set up a play area in another room where stuffed animals and other toys can be stored.
- Use vinyl, linoleum® or wood flooring instead of carpeting.

Bathroom

Mold and mildew are tiny plants that grow where it's warm and damp — like in the shower. They release invisible "spores" into the air. The floating spores trigger allergy and asthma episodes. And wherever they land, the spores start growing new mold and mildew.

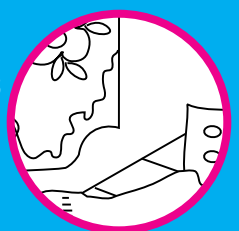
warmth + moisture =



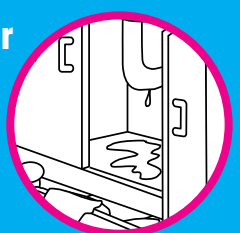
mold and mildew

Areas where mold and mildew are often found hiding:

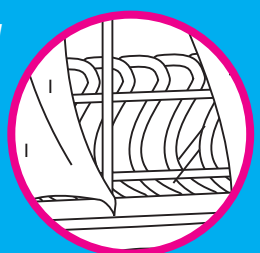
where the floor meets the tub or shower



under the sink



on window frames and sills



Repair leaks and keep these areas dry and clean.

Mold/mildew also grow on "wet" appliances — like air conditioners, dehumidifiers (appliances that *remove* moisture from the air) and humidifiers (appliances that *add* moisture to the air). Follow manufacturer's instructions to change filters and clean appliances regularly.

Read the Label to Find Products that Remove or Control Mildew

If the label says:

Mildew Remover

The product simply ***removes*** mildew and its stains.

If the label says:

Disinfectant

and says it "controls" or "prevents" the growth of mold and mildew, the product will *kill* mold *and* mildew.

You need to clean the area before using the disinfectant.

If the label says:

Disinfectant or Antibacterial Cleaner

The product will ***clean*** the area and ***kill*** mold and mildew.

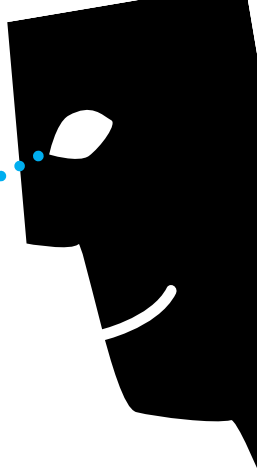
Read the label to see how long to leave the product on the surface (usually from 30 seconds to 10 minutes).

If the label says:

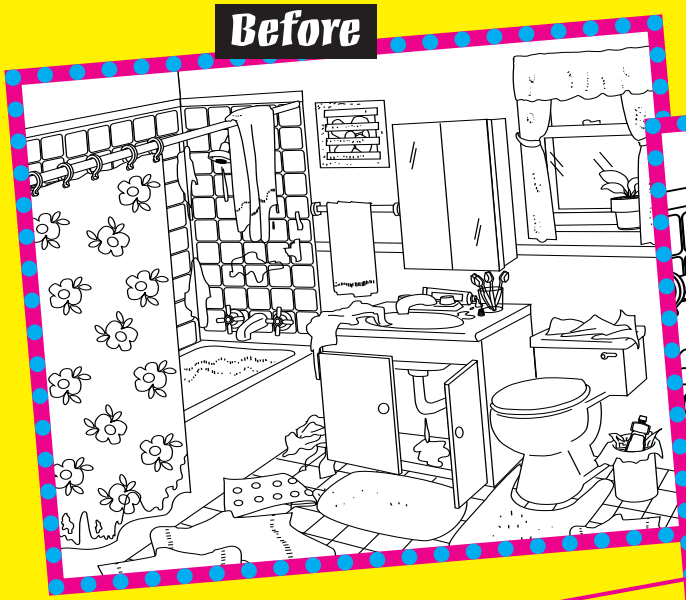
Shower Cleaner

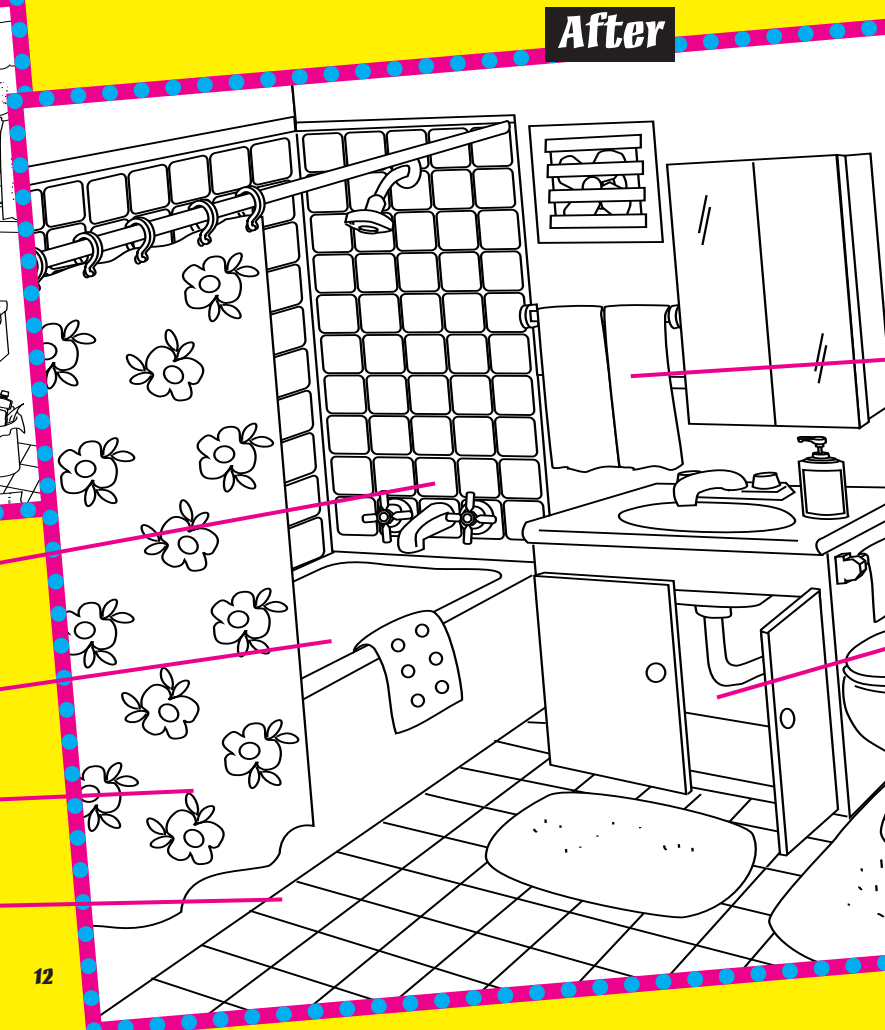
The product will ***keep mildew from growing.***

Use it after every shower.



TIP: Use a disinfectant or disinfectant (antibacterial) cleaner two to three times a week to prevent mildew from coming back.





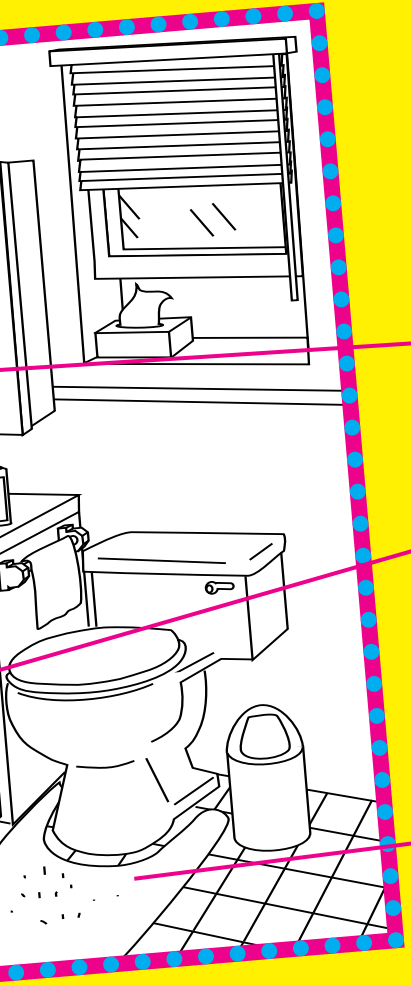
Clean shower stalls and bathtubs weekly.

Clean soap scum weekly; mildew grows on it.

Wash shower curtains monthly.

Wipe up water around tubs and showers daily. Clean weekly.

Bathroom



Wash towels and bathmats weekly.

Keep area under the sink dry and clean. Have leaks repaired!

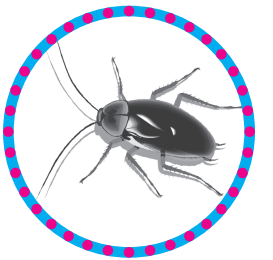
Wash small area rugs weekly.

- Wipe down shower walls after showering or bathing.
- Keep shower doors and curtains open so walls can air dry.
- When possible, open windows or use an exhaust fan to air out the room and remove humidity during and after showering.
- Use linoleum®, vinyl or tile for floor.

Kitchen

Cockroaches are attracted to food and moisture — including crumbs, cooking grease and plain water. It's important to remove or tightly cover all food and water, especially at night when cockroaches are more active.

food + water =



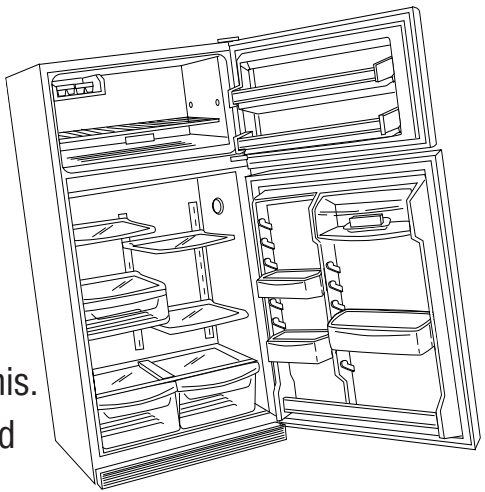
cockroaches

Cleaning the Refrigerator

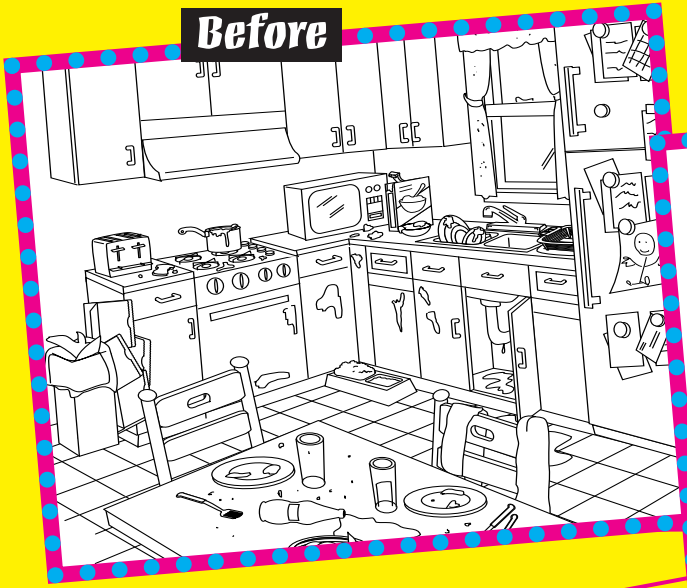
Cockroaches are often found around the refrigerator because of food spills and dampness. These spills and moisture also grow mold and mildew. Keeping your refrigerator clean is an important part of controlling allergens.

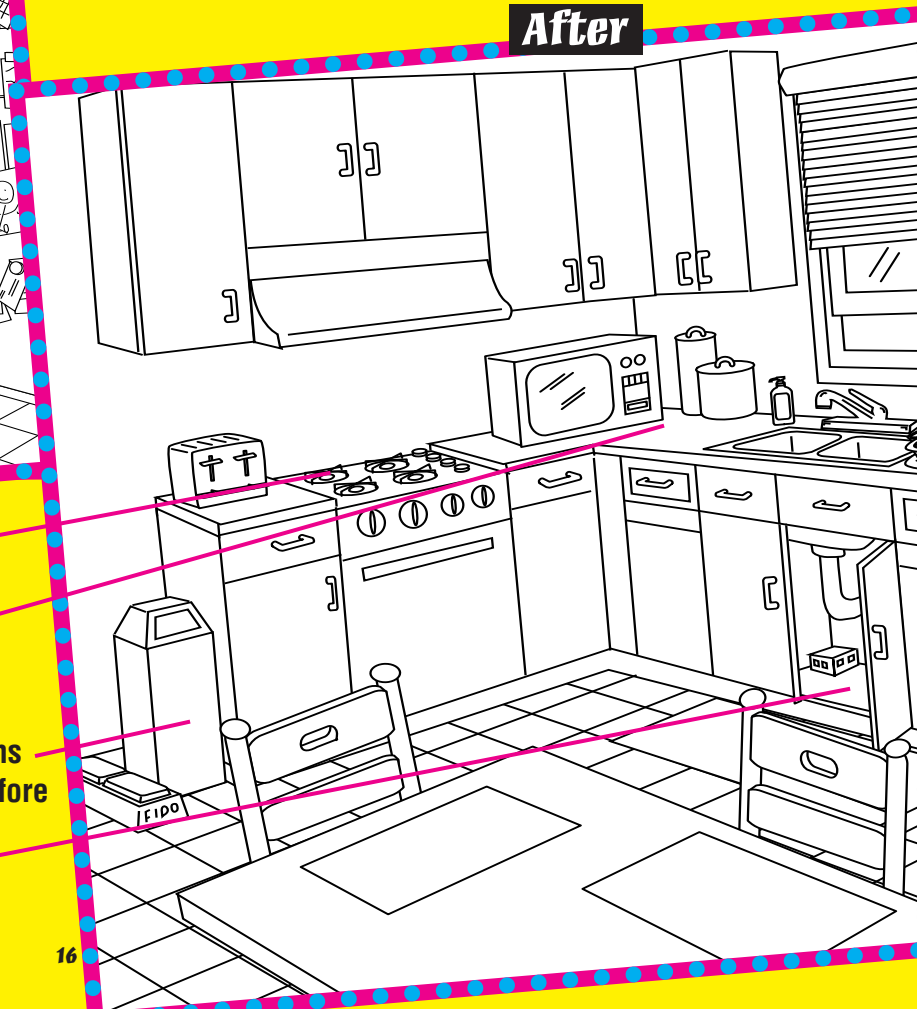
If you have the Owner's Manual, follow the cleaning instructions.

If you don't have the Manual, use these steps:



- Turn controls off.
- Unplug the refrigerator.
- Remove the grille and clean, using a hand dishwashing detergent or an all-purpose cleaner. You may need to ask your maintenance people to do this.
- Remove drip pan, then clean and disinfect it.
- Clean mildew on the rubber stripping around the refrigerator door using a solution of $^3/_4$ cup bleach with 1 gallon water (or 3 tablespoons bleach and 1 quart water).
- Clean walls and shelves with all-purpose cleaner or a solution of baking soda and water.
- Wipe up any water in the inside drawers, and then clean them regularly.
- Clean up spills immediately, especially raw meat, poultry and fish juices. Use a disinfectant (antibacterial) cleaner.





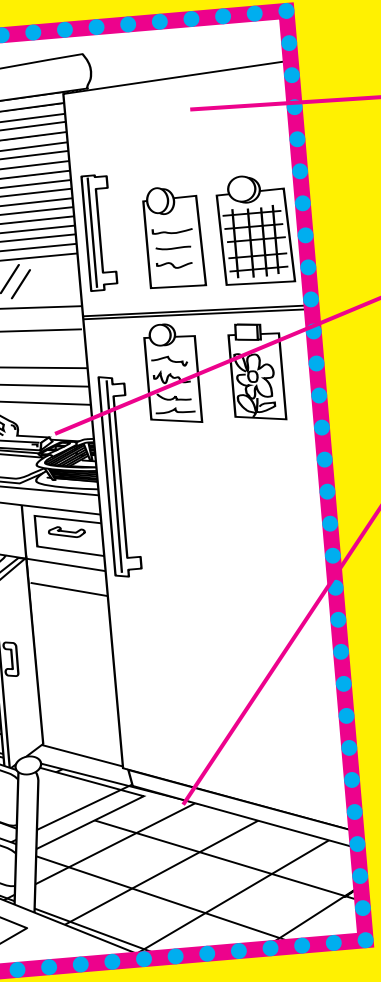
Clean food and grease from stove daily. If possible, clean under and behind stove.

Clean up food spills, crumbs and liquids on countertops and floors immediately.

Empty trash daily. Clean and disinfect garbage cans and recycling bins weekly. Let the cans dry out before you put in a new garbage bag.

Keep the cabinet under your sink dry and clean. Have leaks repaired.

Kitchen



Clean the outside and inside of the refrigerator. If possible, vacuum underneath. (see page 15)

Wash and dry dishes as soon as possible after eating.

Wash floors at least weekly.

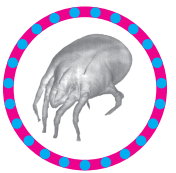
- Keep food in closed containers.
- Don't leave water sitting in open containers.
- Cover any food (including pet food) that will be left out overnight.
- Use baits or gel products to get rid of cockroaches. Follow instructions on the product.
- Seal any cracks around the walls or cabinets where cockroaches can get in.

Throw away or recycle grocery bags. Roaches like to live in them.

Living Areas

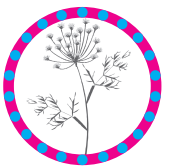
When children play and crawl on the floor, they breathe in allergens. Keep carpets, furniture and curtains as clean and dust free as possible.

carpets and fabrics attract



dust mites

+



pollen

+

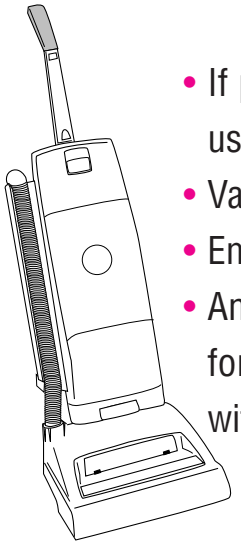
animal dander

= allergies asthma

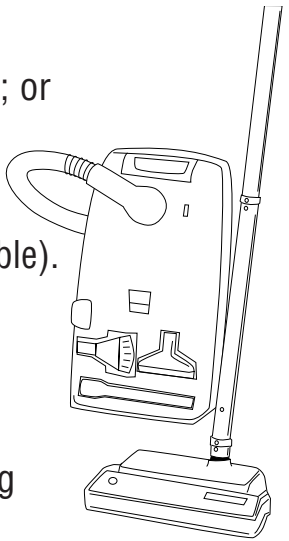
Cleaning Carpets to Control Allergens

When you vacuum, some of the allergens trapped in carpets and upholstery are thrown into the air. Whenever possible, have a non-allergic person do the vacuuming. Or, wear a dust mask and goggles if eye allergies are a problem.

Tips for Vacuuming



- If possible, use a vacuum that has a HEPA filter and/or exhaust filter; or use a special bag that holds allergens inside the bag.
- Vacuum at least once a week. Vacuum more often if you have a pet.
- Empty the dirt bag when it's half full (or throw it away if it's disposable).
- An upright vacuum or a canister with a powered nozzle is best for carpet. They pick up a lot more dust than a canister vacuum without a powered nozzle.
- A canister vacuum without a powered nozzle is good for cleaning upholstery, draperies, blinds and light dusting.



If Carpet Gets Wet

Mold, mildew and germs grow in wet or damp carpeting. Carpets that have been damp or wet for more than 24 hours should be removed or professionally cleaned.

TIP:

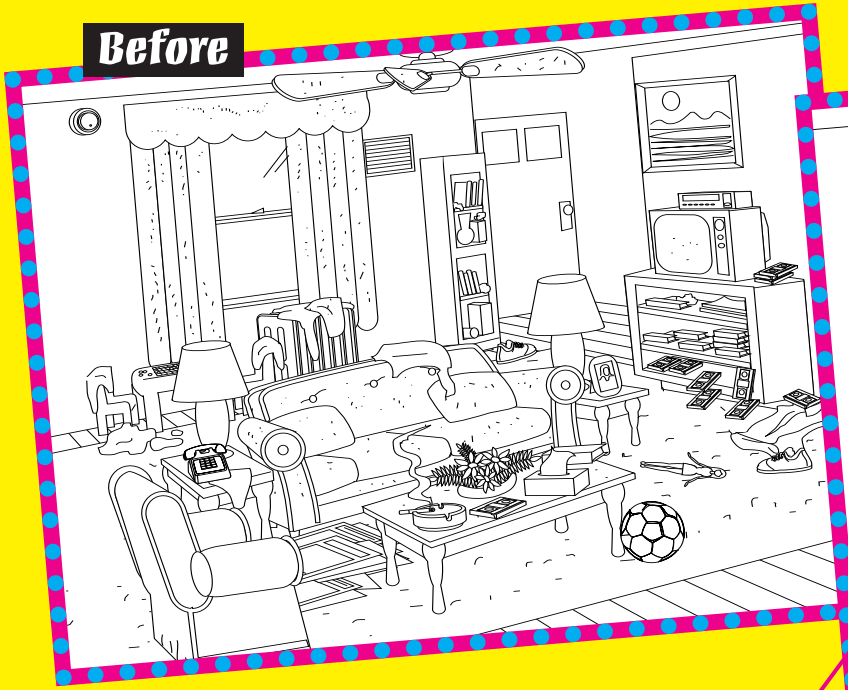
Special Allergen Equipment for Vacuum Cleaners

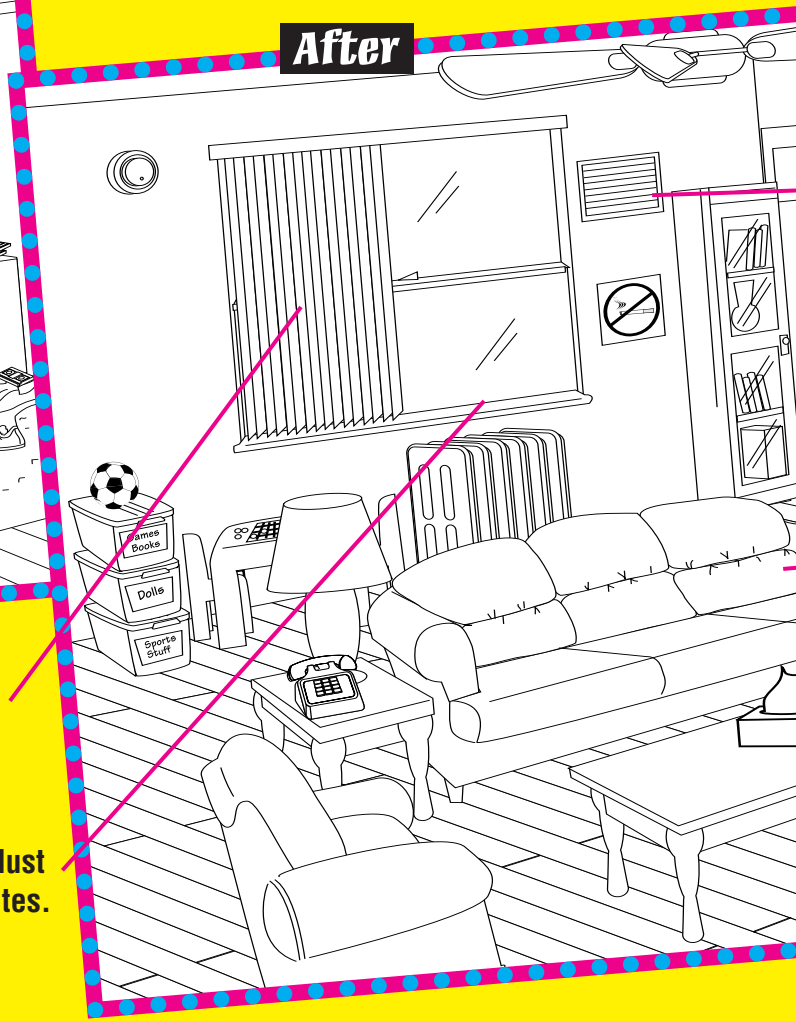
For the vacuum you already have, use:

- A special bag that holds allergens inside the bag.
- An exhaust filter.

If you get a new vacuum, get one with:

- A HEPA filter.
- Special bags that hold allergens inside the bag.

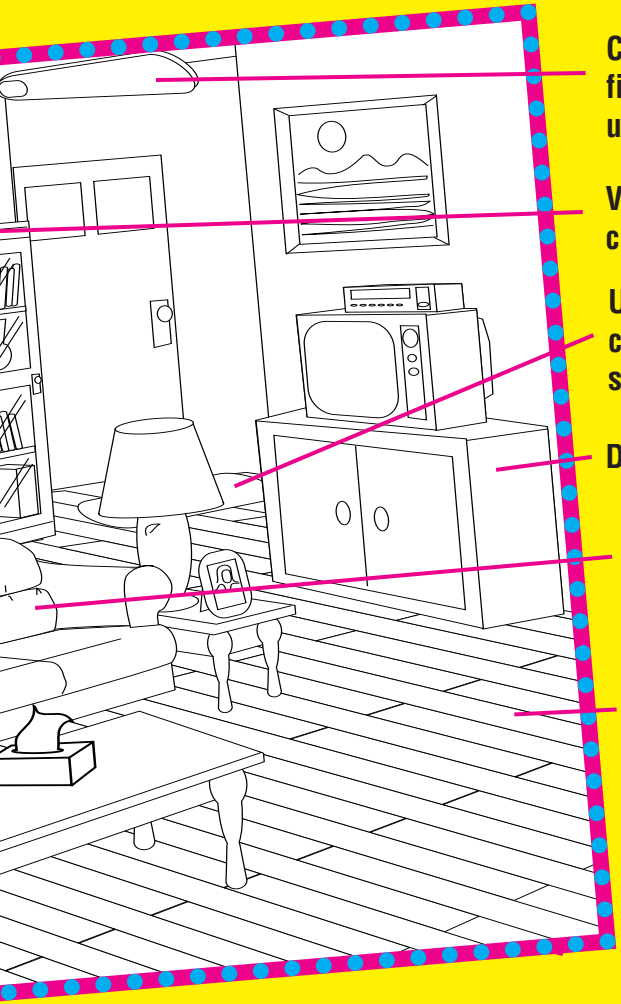




Use smooth blinds or shades instead of fabric curtains when you can. If you use curtains, buy washable ones. Wipe blinds weekly with a clean, damp cloth. Wash curtains monthly.

Clean and dry window frames and sills regularly. The dust that collects there is full of pollen, mildew and dust mites.

Living Areas



Clean ceiling fans and light fixtures at least monthly, using a clean, damp cloth.

Vacuum (see page 19) or use a damp cloth to wipe down air vents weekly.

Use washable rugs at doors to catch dust, pollen and mold spores. Wash rugs weekly.

Dust hard furniture weekly.

Vacuum upholstered furniture regularly.

Vacuum (see page 19) floors and damp mop at least weekly.

- Keep toys, books, “knick-knacks” and stuffed animals in closed cabinets or plastic containers.
- Use filters over air conditioning and heating vents. If possible, change them regularly.
- Use smooth, easy-to-clean furniture, if possible.

The Clutter Plan

Want to save time and reduce allergens? Get rid of clutter!

Having lots of stuff around does more than clutter up a room. It makes cleaning harder and gives places for dust and other allergens to collect. Follow these 4 simple steps to reduce clutter.

1. Sort It Out

Start with a bedroom and take everything out of the closet, dressers, shelves, under the bed. Put stuff in separate piles: clothes, shoes, toys, books, school supplies, sports equipment, etc.

Work with your children to pick the toys and belongings that are most important, and separate those they don't use anymore.

You can give old toys, books and clothes to a friend, community center or Head Start classroom. You can also sell them.

2. Give It A Home

Keep similar items together so that children know where to find things. For example, keep school supplies near the desk or table where your children do homework; store videos by the VCR; toys in the play area, etc.

Put children's things in a place that's easy for them to reach.

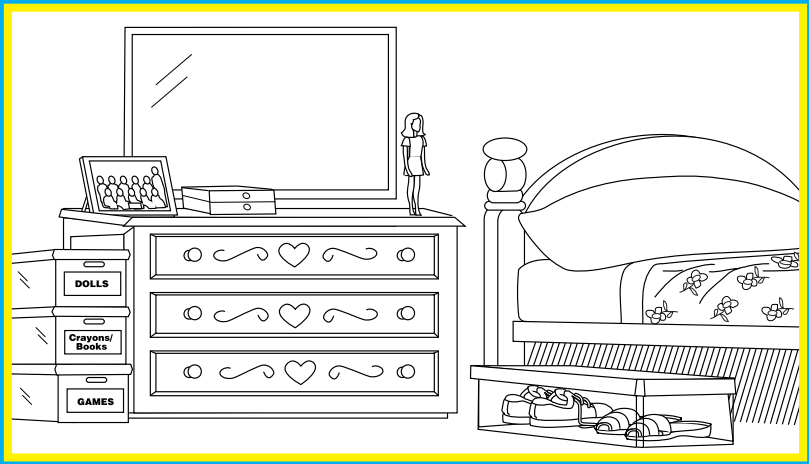
3. Cover It

Put items inside drawers, closets, covered boxes or plastic containers so dust can't collect on them.

Put labels on containers to show where things belong. Have your children write or draw labels.

4. Use It

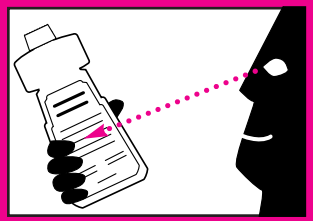
Review the "clutter plan" with your children. Remind them that controlling clutter may help reduce asthma attacks. Have them try to put one thing back before getting out something else. Or, schedule 5 minutes of clean-up time every night.



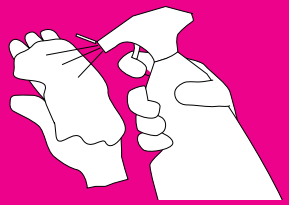
Cleaning if You Have Allergies or Asthma

Since many allergens float in the air, they are hard to avoid. Cleaning (like dusting and vacuuming) can stir up the air and the allergens in it. Just like other particles in the air, sometimes cleaning products can “trigger” an asthma attack. But, it’s still important to clean. If you don’t, the mildew, dust and other allergens will build up, making asthma symptoms worse.

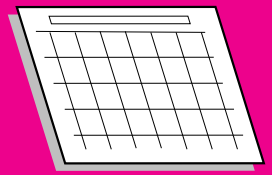
If you have allergies or asthma, here are some important tips:



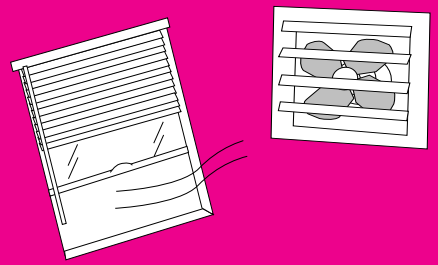
- Read and follow label directions on cleaning products. The label directions give the proper amount of product to use, how to use the product and any special safety advice.



- If you use spray products, spray the cleaner on a cloth or sponge first instead of on the surface.



- Break your cleaning into small tasks. Spread it out over several days instead of doing it all at once.

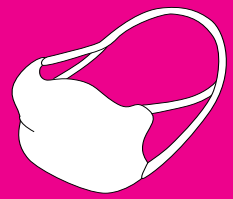


- Clean in a “well-ventilated” area – open a door and a window or turn on an exhaust fan.

- Leave the room when you are done cleaning and allow the room to air out.

- Try using cleaning products that have no scent or are perfume free.

- Try different products to find the ones that work best for you.



- If your asthma is severe, have someone else do the cleaning. Try to leave home when the cleaning is being done.

- If you must do the cleaning yourself, wear a mask.

- Have asthmatic children leave the room when cleaning is being done.

- Don’t ask children with asthma to dust or vacuum. Have them do other chores like washing dishes, taking out the trash, etc.

Safe Use of Cleaning Products

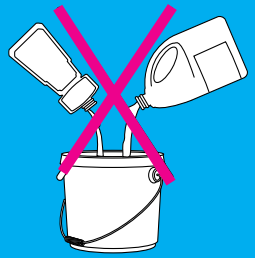
Cleaning products are tested by their manufacturers to make sure they are safe to use. But accidents can still happen, especially with young children.

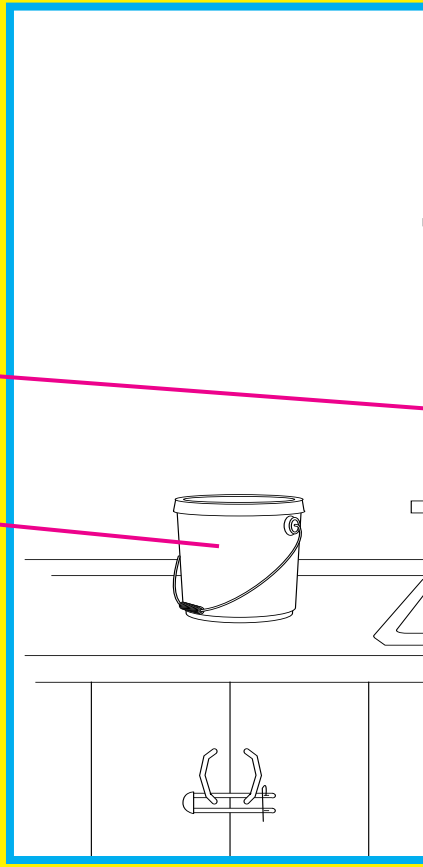
Here are some ways to use these products safely:

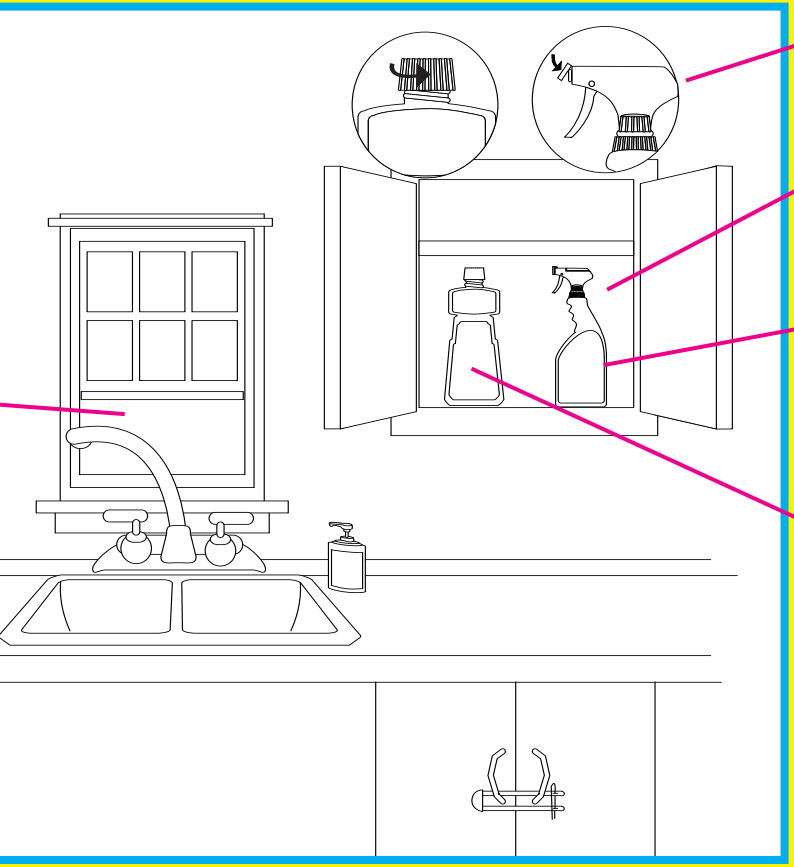
Open windows when using cleaning products, especially if the asthmatic person is home while you are cleaning. Ask that person to go into another room when you are cleaning.

Don't leave cleaning buckets where children or pets can get into them. Young children can drown in very small amounts of liquid. Large buckets are especially dangerous.

Never mix different cleaning products together. They can make dangerous fumes.





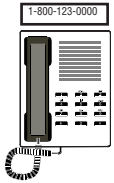


Close caps and spouts and put cleaning products away right after you use them.

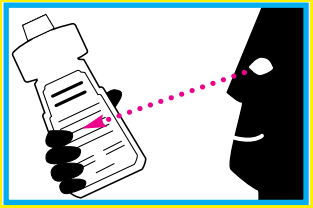
Store cleaning products out of the reach of young children and pets and away from food.

Keep products in their original containers with their labels on. It's important to know what the product is if a child accidentally swallows it. *Never* re-use an empty bottle or box for a different product.

Read and follow label directions. Call the toll-free (1-800) number on the label if you have questions.



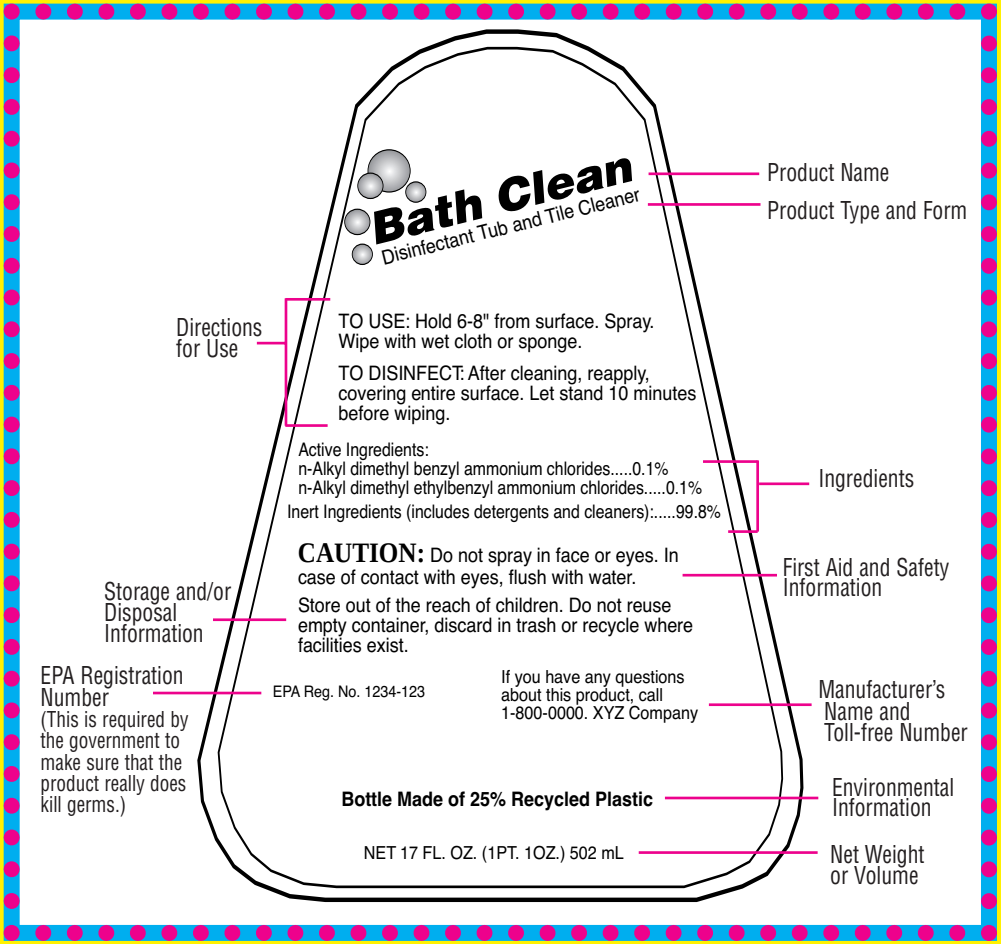
Find the phone number of your local poison control center in the phone book. Keep the number near the phone in case of an accident.



Read the Label

Did you know that disinfectants can take from 30 seconds to 10 minutes to kill germs or mold/mildew? Read the label. Different products work in different ways and can have different instructions for using them.

The label is where to find how to use a cleaning product. Follow the directions to get the best results.



Developed in partnership with ZAP Asthma, Inc., Atlanta; New York City Childhood Asthma Initiative; Seattle Healthy Homes

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