

Common disinfectant wipes expose people to dangerous chemicals, research reveals

Level 1: Elementary

1 Warmer

a. In pairs or groups, discuss these questions.

1. What do you use to clean your house?
2. During the pandemic, did you clean differently?

2 Key words

a. Choose the correct word to match the definitions below. Find and highlight the words in the article to read them in context. Words may appear in a different form.

1. a substance that kills bacteria and makes things very clean
a. disinfectant b. safe c. water
2. a small wet cloth used once for cleaning something
a. wipe b. health c. air
3. when a disease affects many people in a country or the world
a. the flu b. pandemic c. medicine
4. increase
a. go down b. go up c. safe
5. not hurt, sick, or in danger
a. group b. health c. safe
6. produced by a process involving chemistry
a. water b. chemical c. go up
7. a form of bacteria that makes people or animals sick
a. germ b. disinfectant c. medicine
8. get things and keep them together
a. air b. machine c. collect

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9. something you take to make an illness better

a. medicine

b. health

c. group

10. the gas around us that we breathe

a. health

b. safe

c. air

b. Use some of the key words from task A to complete these sentences. You may have to change the form of the word.

- My son (1) _____ comic books.
- (2) _____ (3) _____ became popular during the COVID (4) _____.
- The doctor told me to take this (5) _____ twice a day.
- It's nice to go outside for some fresh (6) _____.
- The hospital saw the number of patients (7) _____ every day.
- The police should help people feel (8) _____.

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Tom Perkins

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- 1 Since the beginning of the pandemic, the use of disinfectants around the world has gone up. Clorox made 1.5 million wipe packages a day by mid-2021. 83% of people said they had used a disinfectant wipe in the last week.
- 2 As schools opened again, a group of scientists were worried as they heard about kids using these wipes on their desks or teachers using disinfectant machines.
- 3 The scientists knew these products did not do much to keep people safe from Covid. Instead, they put kids near a dangerous chemical group called QACs, or "quats".
- 4 Quats are often in disinfectant wipes and sprays, such as ones that "kill 99.9% of germs". But new studies show several problems: health problems, new illnesses, and pollution, and they are not as helpful as people think.
- 5 There are hundreds of QACs used in many products, such as paint, hand sanitiser, shampoo and more.
- 6 Scientists believe that most Americans have some QACs in their blood. Recent research checked more than 200 people in Indiana before and after the pandemic and found quat levels went up from about 83% before the pandemic to 97% after.
- 7 Quats can enter human bodies in several ways: through the skin, through the mouth, by touching a disinfectant wipe or by touching disinfected things.
- 8 Small children in nurseries or schools, older people in care homes, healthcare workers, cleaning professionals and others who often use disinfectants have the highest chance of quats in their bodies.
- 9 Quats don't leave the human body easily and are thought to collect in both human bodies and the environment. The study says that quats can kill fish and may help to make superbugs, which are illnesses that medicine cannot stop.
- 10 Research suggests 10 Quats are often only a little better than soap and water, and we don't need them to stop Covid because it moves through the air.
- 11 Soap and water are safest for cleaning, Carignan added. She said we should only use disinfectants when someone is ill or has stomach flu; even then, people should rarely use them.
- 12 Scientists are asking for more studies on quats, including what they do to human health, clear product information, and using them only when we need them and when there is no safer choice.

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3 Comprehension check

a. Answer the questions using information from the article.

1. How many wipe packages did Clorox make in 2021?
2. How many people said they used a wipe in the last week?
3. What is the dangerous chemical group called?
4. What is one of the problems with quats?
5. What is one product that contains these chemicals?
6. How many people in Indiana were tested for quats?
7. What are three ways the chemical can end up in people's bodies?
8. What groups of people are most likely to have quats in their bodies?
9. What is the safest thing to clean with?
10. What did the scientists ask for?

4 Key language

a. Use each preposition from the article to complete the sentences.

around

by

in

near

through

1. We want to travel _____ the world.
2. I saw your medicine _____ the kitchen.
3. Your keys are on the table _____ the door.
4. To get there, you have to go _____ the tunnel.
5. I'll meet you at the café _____ the train station.

b. Write three personalised sentences using the prepositions from the task above.

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5 Discussion

a. Discuss these statements.

- “Quats are dangerous, but we should still clean with them.”
- “We need clear information about products with quats in them.”
- “Soap and water are not enough to clean things well.”

6 In your own words

- a. Use an internet search engine to find more information about products that contain QACs or quats. *What are some things that have quats in them? Why are they good? Why are they dangerous? Do you think people should use them? Why or why not?*
- b. Report your findings to the class and share your opinion about the issue.