

## On Parenting

### Preschoolers and Spray Cleaners Don't Mix

Parents may think they've childproofed the house, but household cleaners are still posing a risk to curious toddlers and preschoolers, despite years of effort to promote child-resistant packaging and safe storage of dangerous chemicals. The good news is that the number of children ages 5 and younger who landed in emergency rooms because of injuries caused by household cleaning products dropped by 46 percent from 1990 to 2006, according to the new study in *Pediatrics*. But that still means that more than 10,000 children a year are being needlessly harmed by bleach, detergent, and other toxic yet common cleaners.

[[Pesticides: 5 Ways to Reduce Children's Exposure](#)]

Spray bottles are the biggest culprit. The percentage of injuries caused by products in spray bottles rose from 30.3 percent in 1990 to 40.8 percent in 2006. That may be because products are more commonly packaged in spray bottles these days; was anyone using laundry pre-treatment sprays in 1990? But the researchers, at [Nationwide Children's Hospital](#) in Columbus, Ohio, and the Arizona Emergency Medicine Research Center in Tucson, speculate that it may be that the shut-off valves on spray products are no match for a curious 4-year-old. And in many cases, the child injured was not the one wielding the spray bottle. It's easy to imagine the appeal of a spray-bottle war for children too young to realize that the liquid inside isn't harmless water.

[[Prenatal Exposure to Chemicals Linked to Breast Cancer Risk](#)]

Clearly we parents have some work to do in making sure that the cleaning products we have don't harm children. Here are three places to start:

- Store cleaning products in a place where young children can't see or touch them. Earlier studies have shown that even though parents think they are complying with recommendations that [poisons](#) be stored in locked cabinets, almost no families follow the advice in real life.
- Be aware that spray bottles pose a particular hazard, especially when chemicals are sprayed on a child's face or eyes. Even seemingly benign substances like detergents can cause serious eye injury.
- Buy products with child-resistant packaging, and don't put cleaning products in other containers. Some children are poisoned because adults put hazardous products in sports drink bottles, for example.

If you think your child may have been exposed to a dangerous chemical, call the [National Poison Center](#) hotline at 1-800-222-1222. The center also offers advice on how to [safely store cleaning products](#) and other household chemicals.