

THE GreenGUIDE

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Antibacterial Soaps, Body Washes and Towels

by P.W. McRandle

We live in fear of microbes to the point that we'll buy antibacterial soaps, body washes, toothpaste, even bath towels. And why shouldn't we? Would anyone prefer to suffer from gingivitis and plaque? Unfortunately, we may be getting more than we bargained for.

In a review of recent studies, researchers at the University of Michigan School of Public Health have found that the ingredient commonly used in these products, triclosan, provides no additional benefits beyond those of plain soap; it also may contribute to the rise of many different drug-resistant bacteria, including a relative of tuberculosis. In an earlier study, "We surveyed many different bacteria and found that many species on people's hands could survive in very high levels of triclosan," notes author Allison Aiello, Ph.D., assistant professor of epidemiology. As for drug resistance, "Even when bacteria in these lab studies are exposed to quite low levels of triclosan," Aiello says, "they can acquire traits that allow them to become cross-resistant to other bacteria." This held true for *salmonella*, *E. coli*, staph infections and bacteria that cause pneumonia.

Given that triclosan can also form the probable human carcinogen chloroform when exposed to chlorinated water, you may take pause lathering up with that antibacterial soap next time you shower. (Never mind the fact that triclosan has been found in rivers or that it can concentrate in fish tissues to be eaten by us later.) So what should you choose? Avoid soaps, body washes and other bathroom products (including towels!) that advertise themselves as "antibacterial" or "antimicrobial." The majority of products so labeled include triclosan or the similarly problematic compound triclocarban.

Product Picks

Check out these products free of antibacterials and other "dirty dozen" ingredients (see [The Dirty Dozen Chemicals in Cosmetics](#)):

Bath sets (one towel, one wash cloth, one hand towel): **EcoBathroom** pure bamboo (\$45) and organic cotton twill sets (\$50; www.ecobathroom.com); **CB2** bamboo/conventional cotton set (\$36.85; www.cb2.com, 800-606-6252).

Hand soap: **Paul's** USDA-certified organic soap (\$10.60/bar; www.paulsorganic.com); **Miessence** liquid hand soap (\$18.95/8.5 fl.oz.; www.mionegroup.com)

Body Wash: **Miessence** Sunflower Body Wash (\$16.95/8.5 fl.oz.; www.mionegroup.com); **Perfect Organics'** Ultimate 3-in-1 Body Wash can be used as a shaving gel, shower gel and bath soak (\$13.99; www.perfectorganics.com, 800-653-1078).

Toothpaste: **Peelu** toothpaste, made from the bark of the Arak tree (\$3.74; www.amazon.com); **Jason** Power Smile, Healthy Mouth and Sea Fresh toothpastes (\$5.69; www.drugstore.com).

Resources

- * Alliance for the Prudent Use of Antibiotics: www.tufts.edu/med/apua/
 - * World Health Organization: www.who.int/health_topics/drug_resistance/en
 - * U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov/drugresistance
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