

EWG's Green Back-to-School Guide for K-12

Some school supplies contain materials that are toxic for kids and harmful to the environment. Learn which to avoid and how to pick safer alternatives:

- 1. Art supplies.** Many contain toxic chemicals that aren't suitable for children – especially younger ones. Pay special attention to these: Paints should be water-based to avoid solvents and colored with natural, non-metal pigments. Don't buy polymer clays that stay soft at room temperature or can be hardened in a home oven – they're made from PVC (polyvinyl chloride) and often contain phthalates. Consider making your own "clay" out of common baking ingredients instead. Note: A label that says "Conforms to ASTM D-4236," simply means that the product is labeled as required, not necessarily safe.
- 2. Crayons & markers.** Common crayons often contain paraffin wax, which is made from crude oil. Look for alternatives like soy or beeswax. Don't buy dry-erase and permanent markers, which contain solvents. Be wary of plastic-encased crayons and scented markers – scents encourage kids to sniff them, and the chemicals used in the fragrances are not listed on the label. Try a pencil highlighter instead of the familiar plastic ones.
- 3. Glue.** Minimize kids' exposure to extra-strong or instant adhesives like epoxies, model and "super" glues; they contain toxic solvents. Water-based glues are safer bets, though most are made from petrochemicals. Some better options are: glue sticks, white/yellow/clear "school" glue. Children should not use rubber cement.
- 4. Hand washing.** Choose sanitizers with ethanol (ethyl alcohol) but no fragrance and opt for liquid hand soaps without triclosan, triclocarban or fragrance. And remember: Plain soap and water is often just as effective! More @ www.cosmeticsdatabase.com.
- 5. Backpacks.** If it's time for a new one, choose natural fibers and skip those made with PVC. If natural fibers aren't an option, polyester and nylon are better than PVC. (Check the label for #3, the symbol for PVC, or look for "no PVC" on the label.) Labels don't always list the material, so you may need to ask manufacturers.
- 6. Lunch boxes.** It's especially important that lunch boxes be made from non-toxic materials with NO lead paint, PVC, BPA or antimicrobial chemicals. Some options are: cotton lunch bags or lunch boxes and thermoses made from BPA-free plastic or unpainted stainless steel. Reuse utensils from home and pack food in reusable, rather than disposable, containers (like lightweight stainless steel or # 1, 2, 4 or 5 plastics).
- 7. Beverage bottles.** Skip commercial bottled water – it's expensive, wastes resources, and the water quality isn't necessarily better than tap. Instead, send your child to school with filtered water and other beverages in a reusable bottle made from stainless steel, BPA-free plastic or BPA-free aluminum.
- 8. Pencils & pens.** Pick plain wooden pencils (no paint or glossy coating) made from sustainable wood or recycled newspaper. Skip the scented ones. Find recycled plastic ballpoint pens.
- 9. Notebooks & binders.** Avoid plastic covers on binder and spiral notebooks; they're usually made from PVC (#3 plastic). Opt for recycled cardboard or natural fibers, instead, or look for "no PVC" on the label.
- 10. Paper products.** Look for recycled paper made from at least 30% post-consumer waste (PCW) that isn't whitened with chlorine bleach. Or consider virgin paper made from alternative fibers or sustainably managed forests. Choose 100% recycled tissues and paper towels made with PCW and without chlorine bleach. Avoid added lotion, fragrance and dyes.
- 11. Cell phones.** Many kids have cell phones. If purchasing a new phone, choose one with lower radiation ("SAR" value) by searching EWG's cell phone database. Teach your child that when she's not using it, she should turn it off, store it in her backpack or somewhere else away from the body, and text instead of talking. More tips @ ewg.org/cellphone-radiation.

Safe practices for kids' arts & crafts:

- ✓ Supervise young children.
- ✓ Choose products that list all ingredients.
- ✓ Read warnings & follow product directions.
- ✓ Ventilate the room.
- ✓ Don't eat & drink.
- ✓ Keep lids closed and caps on.
- ✓ Wash hands when done.
- ✓ Sniffing products is dangerous.