



# beating bugs

Antibacterial products are everywhere, but do we really need them — and are they doing more harm than good?

BY ART HISTER



there only for the sake of our convenience. The sad reality is that we have depended on the companies that manufacture these products to conduct most of the effectiveness and safety studies about them. If you ask me, this is a terrible way to go about it because it means that when push comes to shove, we don't know nearly as much as we should know about these chemicals.

2. There's a somewhat narrower issue that really troubles me, as someone

of bacteria and viruses that may be even nastier than those that surround us now.

Moreover, most experts now agree (as does certainly everyone of my generation) that some exposure to dirt and grime and schmutz is undeniably good for all of us — babies, kids and adults. In this world that we of necessity share with germs (they were here long before we showed up and they will surely be around long after humans are gone), some exposure to normal

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who was brought up mostly outside on playgrounds and ice rinks, and was forever dirty and never sick. We seem to have become a society that relies on antibacterial products — in hand sanitizers, baby products, mouthwashes, even socks and kids' clothes — even though there is very little proof that these chemicals are effective at preventing illness (outside of special settings such as hospitals, perhaps). And there is a real potential nasty downside to the widespread use of such products. The more we use them, the more likely it is, I think, that we will breed resistant strains

microbes in our environment is an important way to keep our immune systems running properly.

Finally, there's this: If you do want some protection from dirt and bugs, Mother Nature, the smartest female in the universe (with perhaps the sole exception of my own mother) has provided Canadians with plenty of water, which along with a bit of soap, will do the job for you.

Just remind yourself often of this variation of that old rock 'n' roll standard by The Ventures: Wash, don't rub. ■

**T**he US FDA announced recently that it's reviewing the ubiquitous antibacterial chemical, triclosan. Apparently, 75 per cent of us have some trace of it in our urine — yikes! Recent studies and reports have raised concerns about this product, both in terms of its effectiveness (in real life, it doesn't work nearly as

well as studies have claimed) and more worryingly, in terms of its safety, especially for fetuses and infants. In animal studies, triclosan has been shown to disrupt endocrine systems. Which brings up some important considerations . . .

1. The broad issue is this: We use thousands and thousands of chemicals on a daily basis in our lives, most of which are (debatably)

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