


# Art Smarts!

## Quick tips for safe use of art and craft materials

Today's safety and labeling laws are designed to ensure art and craft products marketed for children are safe when used as intended. However, some art and craft products marketed for the general public may be inappropriate for children because they may contain harmful substances, such as lead, cadmium, or certain kinds of solvents. Children are at heightened risk due to their small size and developing organ systems. Also, they are more likely than adults to sniff art and craft materials, put them in their mouths, or get them on their skin.


Parents, teachers, school administrators, and others who order or purchase art supplies for children should take basic steps to ensure that the products they select are appropriate and safe. This fact sheet contains tips for selecting and using art and craft products to ensure children's safety.

### How can I be sure my art project is safe for children?




Choose safe art projects

- Avoid products bearing hazard labels
- Have adults using appropriate protective gear carry out any unsafe steps (develop photos or film, fire ceramics, airbrush, etc.)



Use products as directed

- Use the product according to safe use instructions
- Supervise children to make sure they are using the products properly
- Keep materials in original containers, or with original labels



Maintain a clean project area

- Keep food and drinks away!
- Open windows and use fans to disperse vapors
- Wash hands and surfaces after finishing art projects

### What should I look for on art product labels?

Art and craft products are labeled to inform users about potential hazards and safe use instructions. Federal law neither defines 'non-toxic' nor prohibits the term on art products that do not require cautionary labeling, but even these products can cause harmful effects when used in unintended ways. Read all instructions before use, and look for these phrases:



**Conforms to  
ASTM D-4236**

Federal law requires this statement on all art and craft products to indicate the label properly informs users about potential chronic health hazards and safe use.



**DANGER!**

**CAUTION**

**WARNING**

Signal words like these indicate the product is potentially hazardous and should not be used by children. Carefully follow safety instructions, or use safer alternatives.

MATERIALS TO AVOID	SAFER ALTERNATIVES
✗ Aerosols, sprays	✓ Liquid non-aerosol products, manual applicators
✗ Cold water dyes, commercial dyes, powder dyes	✓ Plant-based dyes (such as canned beets, cranberries, frozen blueberries, turmeric)
✗ Instant papier-mâché	✓ Papier-mâché made from newspaper and library paste or white paste (flour/starch and water)
✗ Powdered forms of clay, glazes, paints, pigments	✓ Moist clay, liquid non-aerosol products
✗ Products containing lead or heavy metals (some enamels, glazes, paints)	✓ Similar products without chronic health hazard labels, water-based markers and paints
✗ Solvent-based products (rubber cement, turpentine, permanent markers)	✓ Water-based glues, markers, and paints

### HOMEMADE FINGER PAINT

- 1 cup flour
- 4 cups cold water
- plant-based color\*



In a medium pot, combine flour and 1 cup cold water. Stir until smooth. Add the remaining 3 cups cold water. Cook and stir over medium heat until the mixture thickens and bubbles. Pour the mixture into heat-resistant bowls. Use plant-based color to tint as desired. Cover with plastic wrap and let stand until cool.

### STOVETOP PLAY CLAY

- 1 cup flour
- 1 cup water
- 1/4 cup salt
- 2 tbsp. cream of tartar
- 1 tbsp. oil
- plant-based color\*



Mix flour, cream of tartar, and salt in a medium pot. Add water and oil. Cook over medium heat 3-5 minutes, stirring frequently. When dough forms, remove from heat and knead on a floured surface. Divide into portions, and mix in different plant-based colors. Store in an airtight container or baggie.

\* **Plant-based color** can be made by draining juice from canned beets or thawed frozen berries, or by simmering then draining coffee, tea, or crushed plant material such as purple grapes, red or yellow onion skins, walnut hulls, cranberries, or oak or apple tree bark.

### Where can I find more information?

Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment

<https://oehha.ca.gov/risk-assessment/art-hazards> — list of hazardous art materials, safe use guidelines

Consumer Product Safety Commission

<https://www.cpsc.gov/> — product recalls, art product labeling, federal laws and regulations

<https://www.cpsc.gov/s3fs-public/5015.pdf> — Art and Craft Safety Guide Household Products Database

National Institute of Health

<https://householdproducts.nlm.nih.gov/> — product safety

