



## **Borax Mixes Not Safe for Children**

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As the rainy weather sets in many of us look for indoor activities to do with children. Arts and crafts activities are popular, as are a variety of kitchen projects. Any activity with young children needs careful supervision and thought given to safety.

There are play activities where young children handle borax. Borax is not a safe, nontoxic material. The most popular use of borax in an activity is as “goop” or “gak,” made by mixing borax and glue into a slimy paste. Safer recipes for “goop” are provided below, along with homemade cleaners and other kitchen chemistry recipes. Please share this information with teachers, parents, and other caregivers.

Boric acid or borax comes from naturally occurring boron, which is an essential nutrient for plants. People use borax as a whitener, cleanser, and pesticide. Although it is seen as a less toxic, natural product, it is toxic by ingestion as well as through skin absorption, especially through damaged skin. Studies have shown that borax contains trace amounts of arsenic.

For these reasons, young children should not handle borax at all. Borax is toxic if eaten, and anything that children get on their hands has a good chance of winding up in their mouths, eyes, or nose. Adults can handle borax for use in cleaning but should avoid direct contact and use it in limited amounts. Wear gloves when handling borax because of its rapid absorption through broken skin.

### **Goop**

Ingredients: cornstarch, food color, water.

Directions: Place cornstarch in bowl. Add water slowly, experimenting with different textures. When desired consistency is reached, add a few drops of food color (optional).

## Cooked Playdough

Ingredients: 2 cups flour, 2/3 cup salt, 2 cups water, 3 tablespoons cream of tartar, 3 tablespoons vegetable oil, food coloring.

Directions: Place flour, salt, and cream of tartar in saucepan. Pour water and vegetable oil into measuring cup, add to saucepan and mix thoroughly. Cook over low to medium-low heat, stirring constantly. Mixture is done when it is hard to stir and consistency of mashed potatoes (approximately five minutes). Cool, add food coloring, knead until smooth (add extra flour if sticky). Store in tightly closed containers.

## Penny Cleaner

Ingredients: 1 tablespoon vinegar, 1 tablespoon salt, small bowl, spoon, pennies.

Directions: Mix equal parts vinegar and salt in a shallow bowl. Place old pennies in bowl, stir with spoon, and watch them brighten. Rinse and dry pennies or they will corrode. Vinegar can sting eyes, avoid splashes.

When kids are done with projects and crafts, switch gears. Get children moving indoors with lively dance music. Teach your favorite moves, or go free form. Consider playing games such as freezing in position when the music stops, reversing direction, or changing music moods and movements.

Of course, rainy days do not mean you have to stay inside. There is nothing quite as fun as puddle stomping on a rainy day!

For more information, contact Thurston County Public Health and Social Services Department, Environmental Health at 360-867-2674, [www.co.thurston.wa.us/health](http://www.co.thurston.wa.us/health).

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