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<https://www.chron.com/news/houston-texas/article/Walmart-chemical-burns-disinfected-carts-COVID19-15391572.php>

# Can shopping cart disinfectant cause chemical skin reactions? A Houston doctor weighs in.

By **Rebecca Hennes** Published 3:32 pm CDT, Tuesday, July 7, 2020



IMAGE 1 OF 6

Kira Lugo, 23, of El Paso, said her baby was covered with chemical burns after touching a disinfected shopping cart at a Walmart this Spring.

In the new age of COVID-19, grocery stores across the country are tasked with rigorously disinfecting high-contact areas to comply with federal health guidelines. But the new measures are producing more than just strong, funky smells for shoppers, with some claiming they or their children have suffered severe reactions and even chemical burns after touching disinfected grocery carts.

Texas mother Kira Lugo experienced the negative side effects of strong store disinfectants firsthand and is urging other grocery shoppers to be wary of disinfected carts after she said in a **viral Facebook post** that her child allegedly suffered chemical burns after sitting in a cart at a Walmart store in El Paso.

Lugo, 23, brought her 18-month-old son shopping with her at the store on April 18. By the next day, she said her baby was covered with blisters and painful red markings that emergency room doctors diagnosed as chemical burns. Lugo believes the burns were caused by disinfectant used on the store's shopping carts and said she decided to post

about the incident after seeing other parents make similar claims on social media. X

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Lugo said she reported the incident to Walmart but the company responded by saying there was no evidence it did anything wrong.

"Honestly the least I would like to see [Walmart do] is either change the product or notify the people that are using these carts that something could happen," Lugo said. "As well as train their staff on how to properly use chemicals."

**Walmart told [Chron.com](#) it is looking into the issue and provided the following statement:**

"Customer safety is among our top priorities, especially during these unprecedented times. We're aware of the situation and are actively looking into the matter."

Other grocery store customers across the U.S. have posted similar complaints on social media.

Skin reactions from disinfected shopping carts have been reported at stores as far away as Canada, where **three mothers reported their babies developed blisters and swelling** after touching carts at a grocery store in May. A Florida mother reported her child appeared to have burns on her arms and legs after sitting in a Walmart shopping cart also in May, according to WFTS Tampa Bay. In mid-June, **a Texoma mother said her 7-year-old son was diagnosed with second-degree chemical burns** on his face after touching a disinfected grocery cart at a local Kroger there. A Kroger spokesperson told TV station KXII that the sanitizer being used by the store had not been diluted properly before using on carts.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, COVID-19 is most commonly spread through respiratory droplets but it can live on surfaces for several days. While the CDC recommends high-touch surfaces be routinely cleaned with EPA-approved disinfectants, it also states people should never come into direct contact

with these products as they could cause "serious harm." Staff that handle these

products are advised to wear appropriate PPE and ensure they are instructed on how

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...and to persons outside the country, regarding exposure to cleaners and

disinfectants spiked during the beginning of the pandemic, according to a **recent study from the CDC**. From January through March 2020, calls regarding exposure to cleaners and disinfectants jumped by more than 20 percent and more than 16 percent, respectively, compared to the same three-month period in 2019.

## Chemical burns vs allergic reactions

Dr. John Griffin is a dermatologist at Kelsey-Seybold in Houston. He said the apparent rise of people claiming to have experienced burns or skin irritation from store disinfectants is not surprising. Rather, he anticipates seeing more patients with these problems as the pandemic wears on.

"When we use them [disinfectants] more and more there are going to be some people that develop issues," Griffin said. "[But] most surface disinfectants [and] things you use around the house are not intended to come into contact with the skin until they have actually dried."

Griffin said some disinfectants could cause severe reactions but that depends on a variety of factors including product ingredients, a person's skin or allergy conditions, and certain preservatives that are used in a product.

Griffin said he estimates that the burns shoppers say they have experienced are probably better classified as severe allergic reactions, although the two can be very similar in appearance.

"Irritation is almost synonymous with chemical burns [but] a chemical burn is such intense inflammation of the skin that the skin dies," Griffin said. "It does not take much of an allergen to create a pretty severe allergic reaction."

Chemical burns can develop within minutes to hours and result in redness, pain, peeling and a burning sensation, Griffin said, whereas allergic reactions can develop

within 24 to 72 hours and result in redness, swelling, itching, and sometimes X

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...appropriately, a great majority of people have no problems, ...  
you have sensitive skin, or known allergies, I would take extra precautions and the  
number one precaution is to avoid exposure."

Parents that bring their young children with them to shop should use a cart cover, or an impermeable material such as plastic, to prevent direct contact with the chemicals used to disinfect a cart. Wearing gloves is also another alternative.

Griffin recommends the website [smartlabel.org](https://www.smartlabel.org) to search ingredients used in a cleaning product. [Click here for the EPA-approved disinfectants for use against COVID-19 germs.](#)

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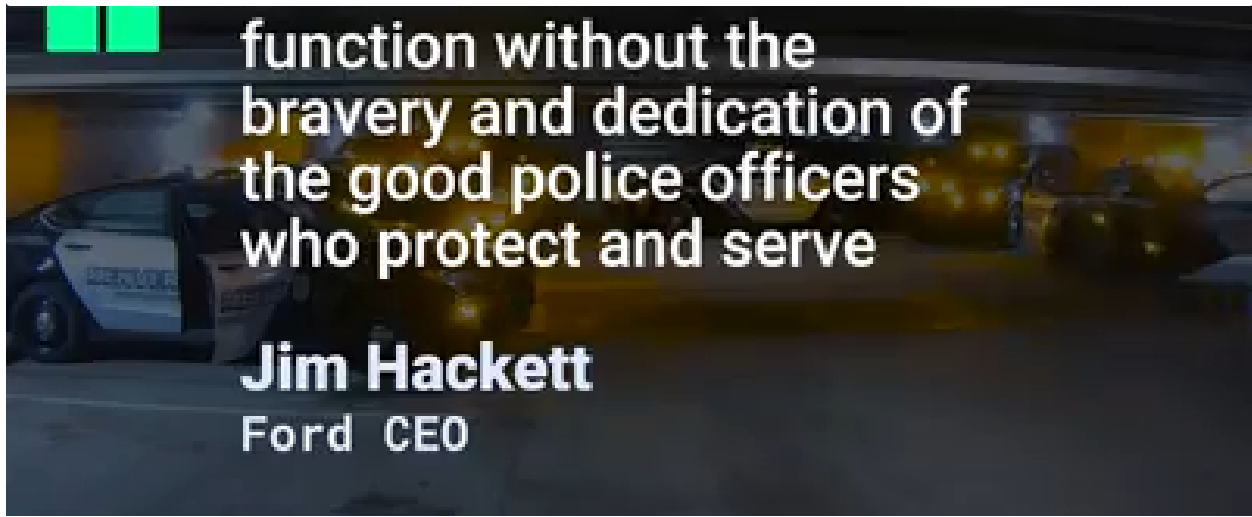
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