Introduction

I. In *The Boy in the Plastic Bubble*, a child born with a deficient immune system is forced to live in a germ-free environment to prevent him from contracting infections.

II. Today millions of Americans are trying to build a bubble around themselves.
   A. The bubble is not made of plastic.
   B. It's made of billions of dollars worth of antibacterial products.

III. Before I studied the subject in my public health class, I always used antibacterial products, and I know from my class survey that 70 percent of you use them.

IV. I'm here to tell you that these products create more problems than they solve.

V. After looking at the problems, we'll explore some solutions.

Body

I. Antibacterial products are a growing problem in American society.
   A. They can be found just about everywhere.
      1. According to the Alliance for the Prudent Use of Antibiotics, 75 percent of all liquid soaps and 33 percent of all bar soaps are antibacterial.
      2. All told, there are more than 1,000 antibacterial household products on the market.
      3. They include everything from cotton swabs, shampoos, and cutting boards to socks, mouthwash, and toothbrushes.
4. *The Boston Globe* reports that mattresses, countertops, high chairs, and even children's toys have been coated with antibacterial chemicals.

5. *The New York Times* calls the antibacterial craze "the biggest marketing coup since bottled water."

**B.** Despite their popularity with consumers, there is doubt whether antibacterial products stop the spread of germs.

1. A study by Elaine Larson, associate dean of the Columbia University School of Nursing, found that families who use antibacterial products were just as likely to get illnesses as families who use regular products.

2. Eric Kupferberg, associate director of the Harvard School for Public Health, states, "Antimicrobial products don't significantly eliminate the number of germs you encounter on a daily basis."

3. Nor do antibacterial products prevent the transmission of colds and flus, which come from viruses rather than from bacteria.

4. As Dr. Larson explains, "Most of the infections healthy people get are colds, flu, and diarrhea caused by viruses"—none of which can be prevented by the use of antibacterial products.

**C.** In fact, antibacterial products can actually increase your chances of getting sick.

1. Stuart Levy, professor of microbiology at Tufts University, says excessive use of antibacterial products can make children more likely to develop allergies and asthma.

2. Dr. James Chin, a research scientist in New South Wales, Australia, says, "The way we stay healthy is by low-dose exposure to bacteria and viruses. You need to exercise your immune system in the same way you need to exercise your muscles to be fit. If you don't do that,
your immune system doesn’t have a chance to do battle when it engages with an infection.”

3. Dr. Myron Genel, chairman of the American Medical Association’s council on scientific affairs, fears the creation of antibiotic-resistant bacteria “that are largely untreatable because they are resistant to existing drugs.”

D. Antibacterial household products also appear to harm the environment.

1. According to Rolf Halden of the Johns Hopkins University School of Public Health, each year the United States releases into the water supply more than two million pounds of the active chemicals in antibacterial soaps.

2. The U.S. Geological Survey reports that chemicals from antibacterial products can be found in streams and groundwater from Denver to remote spots in the Rocky Mountains.

3. These chemicals pollute the water supply, disrupt fish reproduction and growth, and remain active for years.

(Transition: Now that we've seen the seriousness of the problem, let's look at some solutions.)

II. The solution requires federal legislation and action from consumers.

A. We need federal legislation regulating the use of household antibacterial products.

1. Just as the Food and Drug Administration regulates the use of antibiotics, it should regulate the use of antibacterial products.

2. Manufacturers should not be able to add antibacterial agents to their products without oversight from the FDA.

B. In addition, we need to take action as consumers.
1. Most obviously, we should stop buying antibacterial products.

2. According to the Centers for Disease Control, the best way to avoid germs is to wash your hands for 10 to 15 seconds with plain soap and water.

3. A study at the University of North Carolina found that washing your hands with soap and water gets rid of more germs than does using antibacterial hand wipes.

4. Epidemiologist Emily Sickbert-Bennett notes that when you use soap and water, the germs go down the drain, but with antibacterial hand wipes, "You never rinse your hands. You are just rubbing a chemical into your hand and letting it dry."

Conclusion
I. Although we spend millions of dollars every year on antibacterial products, they are not a proven way of stopping the spread of germs or virus-borne illnesses.

II. Worse, they may contribute to health problems and to environmental problems in the U.S. water supply.

III. The federal government should regulate these products and consumers should stop throwing money away on them.

IV. We need to resist the notion that we can use these products to create a bubble around ourselves.

V. Instead, we can burst the bubble of marketers who are selling us a false bill of goods; then we can thoroughly wash our hands of the whole mess.