



## SURFACE**MASTERS**

### **Germiest places in your house**

We asked Oxford and Joe Rubino, another member of the Hygiene Council and director of research and development in global surface care and protection at Reckitt Benckiser -- a corporate sponsor of the council and the maker of Lysol -- to identify the dirtiest places in the home and tell us how to keep them germ-free.

#### **1. Kitchen cloths and sponges**

People frequently use sponges or cloths to wipe germs from surfaces in the kitchen. As a result, 70 percent of kitchen sponges in U.S. homes failed the hygiene test by having high levels of bacteria, according to the Hygiene Council. The council recommends running sponges through the dishwasher regularly and washing kitchen cloths on the hot cycle in the washing machine.

#### **2. Kitchen faucets**

Typically people wash their hands after handling raw meat in the kitchen, but they touch the faucet to turn on the water and do not think about the bacteria that they leave. The Hygiene Council found more than half of faucets in American homes are covered in bacteria. Use a disinfectant spray on faucets to kill germs.

#### **3. Tub and shower**

Rubino identified the shower as the third germiest place in the home. The bathtub may have 100 times more bacteria than the trash can, according to an in-home bacteria study conducted by the Center for Hygiene and Health in Home and Community at Simmons College in Boston. The Hygiene Council recommends that showers and tubs be disinfected twice a week to get rid of dead skin cells left in the tub that can carry germs too.

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### 4. Pet food dish

Most pet food dishes stay on the floor and do not get washed regularly. Rubino said "it's not practical to disinfect it every time, but wash your hands after you touch it. Pets -- we love them -- but they don't practice good hygiene."

### 5. Microwave touch screen

This spot is notorious for not getting cleaned. "You can put something in (the microwave) that is raw to cook it and could leave behind E. coli or Salmonella" Rubino said. He added that even though the food comes out cooked, the germs that can make you sick are left on the outside of the microwave for the next person to touch. It is important to wipe down the touch screen regularly, especially after cooking raw meat.

### 6. TV remote

Imagine the typical couch potatoes -- watching TV while they absent-mindedly chew their fingernails, snack on food and flip through channels, leaving all kinds of bacteria on the remote. "Anything in your home that you touch a lot leaves germs behind," Rubino said. Make sure to sanitize the remote control regularly to prevent sickness.

### 7. Light switches

Touching the light switch is practically unavoidable, but keeping it clean is not. The bathroom light switch can have as many germs as the trash bin, according to the Simmons College in-home bacterial study. Disinfect light switches twice a week or every day if a member of your household is sick.

### 8. Baby changing table

"When changing a baby's diaper, in all likelihood bacterial contamination will occur" Rubino said. He likens the changing table to a "dirty toilet seat" that the baby's whole body touches. During diaper changes, the baby wipes container, the diaper packaging, the trash can and anything around the changing area get contaminated with bacteria through touching after handling a dirty diaper. The baby changing table area should be cleaned often.

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## 9. Garbage disposal.

We all know that we let all kinds of things go down the disposal, from raw meat to cucumber peels to leftover milk from our cereal bowl. The disposal and the bottom of the sink are full of bacteria, "about 1,000 times more than the average toilet has." So whatever comes in contact with it, whether it be utensils, dishes, or your cutting board, can become contaminated. At least once a week you should "clean the disposal's rubber stopper with a diluted bleach solution — soap and water aren't enough."

## 10. Welcome mat

This was a surprise to me, but it makes sense. It's a place where people wipe their shoes off, and one study found "that nearly 96 percent of shoe soles had traces of coliform, which includes fecal bacteria." The solution? "Spray the doormat once a week with a fabric-safe disinfectant (SurfaceAide 1000 or SurfaceClean). Leave shoes at the door, and avoid resting bags and groceries on the mat, too."

## 11. Vacuum cleaner.

This device may be used to keep your house clean, but it is party central for bacteria. The wheels, the brushes, and the entrance to the hoses are not at all clean. "A recent study by environmental biology professor Charles Gerba and his team found that 13 percent of all vacuum cleaner brushes tested positive for E. coli, which means you could spread it around the house each time you use the appliance." Eww. Your best bet is to "change your vacuum bag frequently, and do so outdoors to avoid the cloud of bacteria that filters into the air. (Vacuum bags that feature antibacterial linings are best, and are available for many major brands.) Clean the cavity of a bagless vacuum with antimicrobial and let it air-dry.

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