



# Speed-Cleaning to Kill Household Germs

In the ongoing battle between you and household germs, you may think germs have the advantage. Unlike you, they can be just about everywhere at once. And when it comes down to hand-to-hand combat, you may be too rushed or tired or just have better things to do. They don't.

Yet keeping household germs at bay helps keep colds, flu, and other infectious illnesses from spreading. This on-the-go cleaning guide can help you get the upper hand with germs by focusing your efforts on the places where they lurk the most.

## Where the Germs Are

As a rule of thumb, any area of your home with high traffic and surfaces that get touched a lot is a germ bank.

Not all germs are harmful. But where there are germ strongholds, the conditions are favorable for disease-causing viruses or bacteria to lurk.

One study found the kitchen sink had more bacteria than the toilet or garbage can. The only bathroom hotspot in the study's top 10 was the toothbrush holder. Why? Toothbrush holders are often near the toilet, and flushing sends a fine spray of mist onto them. Plus it's easy to forget about them if you're focused on cleaning the toilet and more obvious germ hotspots.

## Getting Started: What You Need to Kill Germs

Cleaning with soap and hot water removes dirt and grime and gets rid of some germs. It's usually enough for many surfaces. But you may want to disinfect areas that are home to a lot of germs.

A cleaner-disinfectant can be good for speed-cleaning because it combines the two steps. You can use it for most kitchen countertops and bathroom surfaces.

Clean areas with sticky spills and dirt you can with soap and water. Then disinfect. To make an cheap, effective disinfectant, mix up to 3 teaspoons of bleach in 1 gallon of water. Never pair bleach with ammonia or vinegar.

Apply it and leave on for three to five minutes. Rinse and let air dry to save time. Or dry with a clean towel.

Always wear gloves and open some windows when you use products with bleach.

if you're using store-bought disinfectants, try not to breathe in the chemicals. Also remember to wipe down areas afterward with water or let cleaned areas, such as countertops, fully dry before you prepare food on them.

White vinegar or hydrogen peroxide are effective homemade cleaners. Never mix hydrogen peroxide and vinegar together, however. And if you use hydrogen peroxide, test it first on an unseen surface to make sure it doesn't discolor or fade it.

## Daily Speed-Cleaning for Germs

You can take down some serious germ strongholds in a half-hour or less a day. If you don't have children or pets, it's even faster because you get to skip the last three steps. Start in the kitchen:

- Clean and disinfect countertops, sink faucet and handles, refrigerator handles, and cutting boards. Check the manufacturer's directions for specialty countertops.
- Clean with dishcloths you can throw in the washer with hot water. Replace towels and dishcloths daily.
- Clean spills on the kitchen floor so they don't attract more dirt and bacteria.
- Empty bathroom wastebaskets and those with dirty diapers. Take out the garbage. Spritz the containers with sanitizing spray.
- Clean and sanitize the bathroom sink faucet and handles.
- Put pet dishes in the dishwasher.
- If you have a child in diapers, clean and disinfect the changing table.
- If your child uses pacifiers, put them on the top shelf of the dishwasher if they're dishwasher safe. Otherwise, wash it and any toys your child mouths with soap and hot water. Check toy cleaning labels first.

## Weekly Speed-Cleaning for Germs

Doing a daily speed clean makes weekly cleaning easier and faster. Once a week follow these steps to wipe out more germs:

- Put the kitchen sink strainer in the dishwasher.
- If possible, remove and hand wash the stove knobs.
- Clean and disinfect the kitchen sink.
- Wash the toothbrush holder and wipe with a disinfecting wipe or put it in the dishwasher if it's dishwasher safe.
- Gather bathroom towels and bed linen. Don't fluff or shake them so you don't spread germs and dust. Wash in hot water, if possible.
- Mop the floors and vacuum carpets.
- Clean the bathroom sink, bath and toilet.
- Disinfect computer keyboards, light switches, telephones and remote controls with a disinfecting wipe that doesn't contain bleach. Squeeze to remove excess moisture first. Always turn off computers before you clean them.

## Monthly Speed-Clean for Germs

These monthly chores take hardly any time:

- Wash pet toys: For hard toys use hot, soapy water and disinfect. Rinse well before you let them dry. Wash soft toys on hot with other laundry.
- Pour a solution of 1 teaspoon bleach and 1 quart water down the kitchen sink drain to sanitize the drain and garbage disposal. Or pour white vinegar down the drain.
- Clean the coffeemaker.

## Clean Sweep Shortcuts

For super speedy cleanups, try these shortcuts:

- Keep cleaning products together in a pail or basket. They're ready when you are and easy to carry from room to room.
- While a disinfectant is sitting, tackle another chore.
- Use a plastic can liner to help control trash spills and leaking. It'll also speed up wastebasket and garbage can cleaning.
- Clean and sanitize refrigerator and floor spills as they happen. That way they won't turn into a bigger mess.

WebMD Medical Reference Reviewed by Dan Brennan, MD on December 10, 2019

### *Sources*

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