

Parenting

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Exposed! The 6 Germiest Places in Your Home

Parents

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Even if your home smells of bleach and passes the white-glove test, reading the next few paragraphs may inspire you to jump into a giant vat of antibacterial gel. That's because no matter how clean you think you are, germs are everywhere. Hear that? Everywhere: In the washing machine. Buried in the mattress. Lurking on the salt and pepper shakers.

Get your kids to wash their hands and other easy, hygiene solutions!

We asked a germ expert to spill the dirt about the microbe-iest spots around. Dr. Charles Gerba, who is a microbiologist at the University of Arizona's Department of Soil, Water and Environmental Science, and consultant to **Coverall Health-Based Cleaning SystemSM** as well as the co-author of *The Germ Freak's Guide to Outwitting Colds and Flu: Guerilla Tactics to Keep Yourself Healthy at Home, at Work and in the World*, remarked, "We won't always be able to prevent ourselves from coming into contact with germs, but it's absolutely imperative to our health to do everything we can to combat germs in the home, the place where we have the most control." Gerba shared the following:

Washing Machines – Ninety-five percent of Americans use cold-water washes at an average wash cycle of around 12 minutes when they do their laundry. Short washes in cold water might remove some germs

from clothing, but many germs remain hidden in the machine to contaminate the next unwitting batch of clothes or linens. If you're a cold-water washer, switch sides and wash most loads in hot water. For undergarments, use bleach to ensure cleanliness.

Carpets and Rugs – Carpets in most homes are 4,000 times dirtier than toilet seats. Think about it: you walk around outside through dirt, mud and grass; on concrete and through spills, water puddles and other liquids—and those are only a few examples. You track soil and germs from your shoes onto carpets and rugs all the time. You can protect against this proactively by taking your shoes off when you walk inside. Expensive vacuums with UV-light technology are also good options for keeping carpets clean.

Salt and Pepper Shakers – Really, how often do you wash your salt and pepper shakers? According to a University of Virginia study that tested places sick people touched in the home over an 18-hour period, salt and pepper shakers returned stunning results, securing a spot as one of the most highly concentrated areas for lingering viruses. Send salt and pepper shakers through the wash after meals or wipe their surfaces with disinfecting wipes to avoid spreading more germs.

Kitchen Sink – With more than 500,000 bacteria per square inch in the drain alone, your kitchen sink is dirtier than most bathrooms. Raw fruits and vegetables and other food items carry salmonella, E. coli, campylobacter and other pathogenic bacteria. Once you've prepared your food, make sure to clean all surfaces on and around the sink with an antibacterial cleanser.

Beds – Whether we're sleeping, eating or having sex, what we do in our beds is our own business—or is it? Germs are in the know, too, and the bed is one of their favorite places to congregate. Water-repellent mattress and pillow covers can help block out bacteria. Washing sheets (with hot water, remember) once a week can go a long way in making sure you're not sharing your bedroom with millions of uninvited guests.

Refrigerator – Anywhere there's food, there's bound to be bacteria. Raw fruits and vegetables come with bacteria, which can live in every corner of your refrigerator. To combat these nasty germs, try to wipe the fridge down once a week, and deep clean once a month. Toss out spoiled food whenever you come across it.

What's the best way to talk to your kids about germs and cleanliness?

Because most kids don't follow proper hygiene after using the restroom, their hands continue to spread "bathroom germs" as they move from one activity to the next, cross-contaminating surfaces. For this reason, the school playground ranks among the germiest places for kids, and almost every child gets major bacteria (including fecal bacteria) all over their hands after playing on playground equipment like swing sets and slides. Kids are also exposed to high levels of germs in their classrooms from desks and shared supplies.

Parents should talk to their children about the germiest places in their schools and homes, and then make certain that their kids know that thorough hand washing is the best way to get rid of germs and avoid getting sick from colds and flu.

What's the proper way to wash hands?

Proper hand hygiene for children means they should spend 20 or 30 seconds to soap up and wash all parts of their hands. This is the same amount of time it takes to sing "Happy Birthday to You!" twice. Children should always wash their hands after using the bathroom, before eating, after touching pets or playing outside or after being near anyone who is sick.

It's also important to talk to your children about not touching their faces and putting their hands to their mouths, eyes and nose. Studies show that young children bring fingers to their faces 40 to 60 times an hour, which is why they can easily become infected from contact with contaminated surfaces.

By Kate Silver for [Parents.com](#).