

Infection Prevention and You



Infection prevention outside the hospital

We know that hospital rooms can harbor germs that can cause serious infections, especially for elderly or immunocompromised patients. But did you know that germs and infections live everywhere, even out in the community? We all play a part in keeping loved ones safe and cared for at home and while eating out.

Hand hygiene is essential

Wash or sanitize your hands after you come home from public places. Wash hands before preparing food or eating, between handling uncooked fruit and vegetables, raw meats, and after toilet use. If there are babies and toddlers in the household, remember that the floor becomes an important source of potential germs as children crawl, lie and sit on the floor. Proper cleaning and disinfecting is important, as well as remembering to wash children's hands with soap and running water frequently, especially before they eat. Try some creative ideas to make hand hygiene as fun as water play.

Use cleaners and disinfectants wisely

A cleaner and a disinfectant are not the same thing. What you use to clean and disinfect surfaces is as important as how you use them. Some products clean, some disinfect, and some do both jobs. The product you choose needs to match the job you need to accomplish.

Cleaners. Cleaners include soap and detergents, which help remove debris on surfaces using bubbles and friction. Scrubbing or a bit of "good old elbow grease" is an important part of cleaning a surface. Washing machines create this by the agitation of the wash cycle. In order to properly disinfect a surface, it must be cleaned before disinfectants are used.

Disinfectants. All disinfectants are not created equally. It is important to pay attention to the type of disinfecting you need to do and what you need to disinfect. It is important to choose the right disinfectant for the right surface. *How long does the disinfectant need to sit on this surface to do the job?* Different disinfectants have different levels of ability to kill germs and need to be left on surfaces for varying length of times. This time can range from about 1 minute to up to 10 minutes. Concentration levels are also a factor in how long the disinfectant will take to be effective, so following label instructions is important. Also be sure to change cleaning and disinfecting solutions and cleaning cloths frequently.

Care with cleaning and disinfecting chemicals

It is also important to understand that chemical reactions from cleaners/disinfectants can be hazardous to humans and pets. Do not mix chemicals. Store cleaning products carefully and out of the children's reach. While it's important to keep your household clean, it's also important to keep children safe from hazardous chemicals.

Focus on kitchens and bathrooms

Hard, smooth kitchen surfaces such as sinks and counters are easier to disinfect than the rough, porous surfaces of wood cutting boards, sponges and dishrags. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends washing countertops with a solution of 1 teaspoon of chlorine bleach mixed in 1 quart of water or with a commercial kitchen-cleaning/disinfecting agent mixed according to label directions.

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Sinks, toilet bowls, showers, tubs, and the floor in the bathroom need regular cleaning and disinfecting. Remember to work from the “top down” moving from cleanest to dirtiest. Reduce chances for mold growth by promptly removing damp towels and wiping up spills and standing water. Germs can also grow in kitchen and bathroom drains. Sanitize drains by pouring a solution of 1 teaspoon of bleach to 1 quart of water or a commercial cleaning/disinfecting agent down the drain.

Bathroom and kitchen hygiene reminders

Do you know where that sponge or washcloth has been? Look for hidden sources of germs in the kitchen and bathroom. According to the CDC, dishtowels and sponges should be laundered by washing in hot water and drying thoroughly on a weekly basis. Disposable sanitizing wipes can be helpful, but remember “one wipe/one swipe” – don’t use the same wipe for all surfaces; you may just be pushing the germs around the surfaces.

Personal items

Don’t share towels between the kitchen and bathroom, or between people. The American Dental Association recommends replacing your toothbrush every three months, more frequently if the bristles shows wear, or if a person has an illness like strep throat. Store toothbrushes upright and allow to air dry. Do not store wet toothbrushes in closed containers. Do not share toothbrushes or other personal items, such as razors or towels.

Pet environment

Keep pet environments clean and remember to prevent pets from drinking out of the toilet. Keep pets vaccinated and bathed, and clean up accidents promptly. Provide clean bedding, water, and food dishes. Protect your pet and your family by preventing fleas, ticks, and other pests that can bring disease into your home.

Bedrooms

Mattress and pillow covers can help reduce opportunities for pests such as dust mites and bedbugs. Wash bedding frequently and dry thoroughly, vacuum around beds, and vacuum mattresses and pillows. If a family member is sick, it is very important to step up the cleaning activities and clean the environment more frequently and more carefully to help prevent the spread of the illness from one family member to another. Keep the ill person and items that person has used, such as dishes, glassware and silverware and towels, separate from other members of the household.

Restaurants

When choosing restaurants, look out for basic clues as to the cleanliness of the facility and the freshness of the food. Freshly-cooked, hot-served foods are safer than foods that have been left unrefrigerated in a kitchen or on a buffet table. Refrigerate and use leftovers promptly. If you take a break from shopping for a snack, don’t forget hand hygiene before you eat.

Purses and diaper bags

Do not place purses or diaper bags on the kitchen table, on the kitchen counter, or anywhere else food is consumed in your home. Bags are often placed on the floors of bathrooms and other germ public areas. If you place purses and diaper bags on surfaces in your home that are meant for eating, you could be spreading disease-causing germs. Be careful about where you store your bag when you get home.

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