

# 8 Sneaky Ways GERMS INVADE YOUR HOME (and body)



With a few small changes, you can lower the chances that an illness-causing virus will make you or your family sick

by LAUREN SMITH MCDONOUGH

Between COVID-19 and the flu, we're all desperate to prevent a bug from worming its way into our households. Fortunately, you don't need to wipe down every single surface to protect your family. Checking off the items below can substantially lower the risk that a pathogen will make itself comfy and cozy in your home this winter.

## ☑ Wash your thumbs.

You're already scouring your hands for 20 seconds, but a lot of people somehow skip their thumbs, says Carolyn Forté, director of the Good Housekeeping Institute Cleaning Lab. As these digits touch some pretty germ-y surfaces (like your cell phone keypad and remote control buttons), make sure they get scrubbed too.

## ☑ Shed your shoes.

We don't do this much in the U.S., but other cultures are wise to kick off footwear before stepping indoors. "Shoe soles have been literally everywhere, and when you wear shoes inside, you track what's on them onto floors and carpets," says Forté. This includes dog droppings, bacteria and whatever else is hanging out on the sidewalk.

## ☑ Elevate your purse.

Think about it: When you set your bag on the floor of a restroom or a restaurant, pick it up and then later plunk it down on your desk or kitchen counter, germs that were in these high-traffic areas are now where you work or prepare food. If your fabric or leather tote has already touched the floor, says Forté, mix a

few pumps of a mild liquid facial soap (like Cetaphil Daily Facial Cleanser) with 2 cups warm water, then wipe it with a soft cloth. While you're at it, disinfect your counter.

## ☑ No phones in the bathroom.

Anything you bring there can get contaminated with germs found in fecal matter (16% of cell phones have them, according to one study). "To kill germs, clean your phone with an alcohol wipe," says Forté. "Better yet, buy a box of individually packaged ones and keep a few in your purse or car."

## ☑ Separate toothbrushes.

Most families have a bouquet of brushes in the rinsing cup. But the flu virus, strep bacteria, staph, E. coli and the novel coronavirus can all live on toothbrushes, so you don't want them touching, especially if someone in the house is sick.

## ☑ Don't forget the handles.

People tend to clean doorknobs but forget kitchen cabinet handles, range knobs and car door handles. Give them a good wipe-down with antibacterial wipes at least every other day, and daily if a family member is ill.

## ☑ Change sheets more often.

Sheets harbor germs, which means whoever is sharing your bed is going to be susceptible to any virus you may have, and vice versa. The longest you should wait to change your sheets is two weeks, but doing it weekly is better. "Launder bedsheets, pillowcases and towels in hot water," advises Forté. "Then dry them using the antibacterial cycle or the hottest temperature your dryer offers."

## ☑ Get your flu shot.

With COVID-19 still prevalent, you'll want to lower your risk of contracting serious illnesses—and getting a flu shot is an excellent strategy. Anyone 6 months old or older should get vaccinated, says Amy Crawford-Faucher, M.D., a family physician at Forbes Family Medicine and vice chair of the Primary Care Institute at Allegheny Health Network. Continue to practice other germ-busting techniques afterward, though, because no shot is 100% effective.