

How to prevent germs from spreading



Germs can be passed from person to person or indirectly by touching unclean equipment or surfaces.

Cleanliness experts say hygienic cleaning will help prevent germs spreading in the home.

Hygienic cleaning involves focusing your efforts on areas in the house where germs are more likely to spread from and cause infection.

Use either soap and hot water (rinsing the germs away) or a disinfectant to kill the germs. Thoroughly dry surfaces after cleaning. Dampness helps any remaining germs to survive and, if there's enough water, multiply.

"Good hygiene is not a once-weekly, deep-down clean," says Professor Sally Bloomfield, of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. "Hygienic cleaning needs to be an ongoing part of our daily lives, where hygiene measures are targeted where and when necessary."

She says that cleaning aids, such as cloths or mops, must be germ-free or they'll spread germs to other surfaces. Germs can multiply easily. Within eight hours, one bacterium on a damp cloth can multiply to six million.

Germs stick to cloths and are difficult to remove by rinsing, so all cleaning materials should be disinfected and then dried after use.

Below are some general hygiene tips to minimise the spread of germs in the home:

Cloths and sponges

- Use disposable cloths or paper towels when possible.
- Re-usable cloths should be disinfected after each use.

Washing-up brushes

- Wash brushes in a dishwasher regularly or clean with detergent and warm water after each use.

Mops and buckets

- Use two buckets for mopping – one for detergent and the other for rinsing.
- Mops and buckets should be cleaned, disinfected and dried after each use.

Lavatories

- Keep the U-bend and lavatory bowl clean by flushing after each use.
- Use a lavatory cleaner and brush every few days.
- Limescale should be regularly removed using a descaling product.
- Keep the lavatory seat, handle and rim clean by using a disinfectant.

Baths and sinks

- Hygienically clean baths and sinks frequently.
- Use disinfectant if they've been used by someone who is ill.

Showers

- Clean shower trays as above for baths and sinks.
- If a shower hasn't been used for a long period, let it run with hot water before using it.

Tiles and shower curtains

- Keep tiles and grout in good condition and clean them often.
- Hygienically clean or launder the shower curtain frequently, depending on how often it's used.

Kitchen

- Ensure food preparation surfaces are hygienically clean.
- Use separate chopping boards for meat (including fish and poultry) and vegetables.
- Wash and dry your hands after handling high-risk foods such as raw meat.
- Hygienically clean surfaces immediately after use.

Floors

- Clean floors regularly to remove visible dirt with warm water and detergent.
- If soiled with vomit or excreta, the floor should be cleaned using a disposable cloth and warm water and then disinfected. Ensure the floor is dry before allowing children on it.

Carpet and soft furnishings

- Periodically clean carpets and soft furnishings using a suitable product.
- Carpets and furnishings can be hygienically cleaned by steam cleaning.
- Curtains can be cleaned by laundering or disinfected by steam cleaning.

Pets and other animals

- Keep pet food separate from human food.
- Always wash your hands after touching animals, their food, toys, cages and litter trays.
- Dishes, utensils and tin openers used for pet food should be stored separately.

Toys

- Clean hard or plastic toys by washing them and storing them once they're clean and dry.
- Some soft toys can be cleaned in the washing machine.
- All toys and equipment should be added to a regular cleaning rota.

Laundry

- Wash your hands after handling dirty laundry.
- To prevent the spread of germs, all underwear, towels and household linen should be washed at 60°C (140°F) or at 40°C (104°F) with a bleach-based laundry product.
- Run the washing machine on empty once a week, either at a high temperature or with a chemical disinfectant to prevent the growth of germs.
- Don't leave laundry in the washing machine as any remaining germs can multiply rapidly.

Waste disposal

- Foot-operated bins are better for hygiene because they reduce the risk of hands picking up germs when they touch the bin lid.
- Always wash your hands after handling waste material.
- Throw rubbish away carefully to avoid attracting vermin and insects.

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