



Fancy Meeting You Here! Targeting Household Germs in Unexpected Places

By Linda F. Golodner

When the weather warms up after a long winter, I get the urge to throw open windows and tackle spring cleaning chores. It's a great feeling of accomplishment to complete these chores, but I recently learned from [WebMD](#) that some of the *germiest* places in homes are not even on most people's radar. The table below, based on information from WebMD, lists the most unexpected hiding places for household germs, the reasons why they thrive in those places, and how you can reduce their unwanted presence.



Germ Hangout	Why They Love it There	What to Do about it
Kitchen sponge	For germs, the kitchen sponge is a moist maze of top-notch dwelling places. Not only is there regular contact with water, but there is also often plenty of food debris swept up in sponges to sustain germs. According to WebMD, your kitchen sponge is probably the dirtiest thing in your house.	Researchers from the University of Florida report microwaving very wet sponges for two minutes at high power kills or inactivates more than 99 percent of all sponge germs. (See For Disinfecting Sponges, Microwaving is a Simple Solution.) Kitchen towels and dish cloths should be replaced daily and laundered using chlorine bleach, if fabric instructions permit.
Kitchen sink	Lots of germs are washed into the sink when meals are being prepared; germs may originate from raw vegetables, fruit, meat, fish or poultry. The constant supply of water and food in the sink encourages germs to proliferate.	Disinfect sink sides and bottom twice per week using a kitchen sanitizer. And pour a solution of one teaspoon of bleach in one quart of water down the drain once each month.
Toothbrush holder	Toothbrushes harbor bacteria from your mouth, and when kept near the toilet in your bathroom, can even become contaminated with fecal bacteria. Toothbrush holders harbor these same germs.	First, position your toothbrush holder as far away from the toilet as possible. Do not allow adjacent toothbrushes to touch, and run the toothbrush holder through the dishwasher once a week. The good news is that toothbrush holders keep brushes vertical, which permits better drying between uses, and germs want moisture.

		Want to cut down on the germs you transfer to your toothbrush? Use an antibacterial mouth rinse <i>before</i> you brush your teeth.
Dog bowl	Fido might appear to lick his food and water bowls “clean,” but don’t be fooled: Pet bowls are havens for microscopic “pets,” such as bacteria.	Wash pet bowls daily with hot, soapy water. Once per week, soak bowls for about 10 minutes in a solution made by adding a cap of chlorine bleach to one gallon of water.
Coffee maker	The chamber that holds the water in your coffee maker is dark and moist, “home, sweet home” for bacteria.	Give those bacteria a jolt by filling the water chamber with a few cups of white vinegar. Wait 30 minutes, then turn the machine on and let the vinegar run through. Follow up by running clean water through the machine.
Stove knobs	Stove knobs are frequently touched, but often overlooked during cleaning. Stove knobs contact the hands of cooks, who shift back and forth between the stove and other food preparation spots, transferring germs and food debris to the knobs.	Remove stove knobs and give them a hot, soapy bath once per week. If knobs cannot be removed, clean them in place.
Bathroom faucet	Bathroom faucets are contacted by hands in need of washing by virtue of the reason people enter the bathroom in the first place. According to WebMD, faucet handles in the bathroom sink have more germs on them than the toilet handle or the bathroom doorknob.	Motion-sensing faucets are an ideal solution, but short of that major investment, sanitize your bathroom and kitchen faucet handles daily using a kitchen or bathroom disinfectant.
Countertops	Countertops are like bus stops for germs. These surfaces are where we may drop off and pick up the “germ du jour.” Daily, we deposit all manner of objects on countertops, and then proceed to wipe them down with our kitchen sponge (see public enemy #1 at the top of this list). Is it any wonder that they become contaminated?	Wash countertops with warm, soapy water, rinse and use a disinfectant recommended by the manufacturer of your countertop.

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