



## Surprising places where germs like to hide

Germs are a reality of everyday life, and despite our best efforts, there is no way to avoid them. While not all bacteria are harmful, some, including *Staphylococcus* and *Salmonella* are — and they are found on more common household items than one might think.

A recent study by NSF International uncovered the “germiest” places in the home as measured by the contamination levels of yeast, mold, Staph, and coliform (a family of bacteria that includes *Salmonella* and *E. coli*). The findings provided some interesting insights into the areas of the home that are neglected during a typical cleaning routine.

### The Germiest Place in the Home

Perhaps the most interesting finding from the study was that the overall “germiest” place in the home was the kitchen. In fact, sponges and dishrags - the very items used to clean most kitchens - topped the list as the germiest item in the home. The high germ count is mainly a function of their use - they pick up bacteria through the cleaning process and are not properly sanitized before their next use. Since sponges and dishrags are seldom left to properly dry, they provide an optimal environment for germ growth.

The kitchen was also the area of the home where coliform bacteria was most prevalent. The study found coliform on multiple kitchen surfaces, including dish sponges/rags (75 percent), kitchen sinks (45 percent), counter tops (32 percent) and cutting boards (18 percent). While these items may be wiped-down regularly, they are not always disinfected or sanitized properly. Because of cross-contamination, a high coliform count on these surfaces can pose potential food safety risks at home.

### Family Pets are Germy Creatures

If your home has a treasured family pet, you may be surprised to learn that pet bowls and toys ranked in the top 10 list of germy household items. When parents and children touch these items, they can pick up germs and bacteria and potentially contaminate other items that they touch if they haven’t washed their hands.

### The Surprise Item in the Bathroom

In the homes that were tested, the germiest spot in the bathroom wasn’t the toilet seat or handle – it was actually the toothbrush holder. Because of its proximity to the toilet, especially in smaller bathrooms, it’s possible for fecal bacteria to deposit on these and other items whenever the toilet is flushed. Needless to say, it’s important regularly wash these holders in the dishwasher, if it’s safe to do so. Otherwise, frequently hand wash them with hot soapy water and wipe them with a disinfecting wipe.

### The #1 Thing You Can Do

While household items have their own cleaning criteria, the best way to eliminate the risk of germs is to wash your hands properly and often, especially before handling food. If you have young kids in your home, visit the [Scrub Club](#) for fun ways to teach them about the importance of handwashing.

Germs often have a bad reputation as harmful organisms that cause health problems, but they shouldn’t be cause for panic. When it comes to germs, the key is to be informed and take the proper steps to protect your family.

Visit the [NSF consumer website](#) for more information on the top ten germ hot spots and how to keep them clean.