

How to Clean Common Surfaces During the COVID-19 Outbreak



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Bathrooms and kitchens are common areas of your home that can harbor germs. Getty Images

- A recent study reports that COVID-19 can live on surfaces such as cardboard for up to 24 hours and plastic and stainless steel for up to 3 days. However, a microbiologist says this doesn't call for panic.
- Bathrooms and kitchens are areas that harbor germs in the home.
- Experts say proper cleaning can clear away a variety of germs.

As experts encourage thorough handwashing and hygiene practices to protect yourself and others from the coronavirus, if you're able to take shelter at home during the outbreak, you may be wondering what you can do to keep your home clear of the virus.

Concern may be on your mind especially since news began circulating about a recent study published in the medRxiv depository.

The study found that COVID-19 can remain in the air for up to 3 hours, and live on surfaces such as cardboard for up to 24 hours and plastic and stainless steel for up to 3 days.

However, Jason Tetro, microbiologist and host of "Super Awesome Science Show," points out that the research is based on a lab test paper.

"The testing is not indicative of what happens in the real world. I don't see any need to clean/disinfect surfaces more regularly as a result. And no one should be afraid of the air like they should be with measles, which is airborne," Tetro told [name removed].

While he doesn't think people need to go overboard with cleaning for the sake of the virus, he says proper cleaning can clear away a variety of germs.

"The coronavirus is just one of the pathogens that could infect you, and others are far more common than this one," said Tetro.

Areas to clean in your home

Tetro says at home, bathrooms and kitchens are always areas that harbor germs.

Becky Rapinchuk, who started the blog Clean Mama and product line by the same name, agrees. When it comes to bathrooms and kitchens, she says focus on the cupboard and drawer knobs, pulls, and fronts. In kitchens, she says also clean the handles and fronts of appliances, such as refrigerator, dishwasher, oven, and toaster oven.

Other areas of the house both experts say should get a good cleaning include those often touched such as:

- remote controls
- game controllers
- keyboards and computer mice
- cell phones and landlines
- light switches and switch plates
- door knobs and doors
- staircase railings

Rapinchuk cleans areas in groups, and from top to bottom, left to right.

“I find the most efficient way to clean those pesky most-touched areas is to batch them together... I do all of the light switches and switch plates, then

move on to clean all the door knobs, all the kitchen handles, etc. This keeps me on task, [so] I don't miss anything. If a certain cleaner or cloth works better for an area, I can use that for the whole house, and if I can't get through [everything on my list] in one go, I can come back to the list," Rapinchuk told [name removed].

For surfaces that have things on them, such as the kitchen table or desks, she says remove all items first and wipe surfaces clean with a wipe or a spray.

If you're still going into work, Tetro says elevator buttons and cutlery/utensils are other areas of concern.

Products to clean with

Tetro says most EPA-registered cleaning products on the market are efficient at cleaning surfaces.

For disinfection, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) states that household bleach solutions should be effective, too.

However, before using diluted household bleach solutions, the CDC says be sure it is appropriate for the surface; follow instructions for application and proper ventilation; and ensure the product is not expired. The CDC warns to never mix household bleach with ammonia or any other cleanser.

The create your own bleach solution, the CDC says mix the following:

- 5 tablespoons (1/3rd cup) bleach per gallon of water or
- 4 teaspoons bleach per quart of water

“Spray liberally on surfaces and wipe clean with a soft cleaning cloth. Generally speaking, all you need is a little all-purpose cleaner and a microfiber cleaning cloth or bar mop towel to clean most of these most-touched areas. All-purpose cleaner can be sprayed directly on your cleaning cloth and then the area can be wiped clean. Spray, wipe, repeat,” said Rapinchuck.

At work, Tetro says use hot water and soap for anything that can be washed.

“For the rest, use a disinfectant wipe,” he said.

And a weekly clean is what Rapinchuck recommends, unless someone in the house is sick. Then she says clean your surfaces daily.

For more information regarding how to clean amongst the coronavirus pandemic, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.