

Get the dirt on germs

February 27 2019



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

Germs are lurking all around us, and they may be hiding in places that you had not even considered. Baylor College of Medicine's Isabel Valdez, physician assistant and instructor of general internal medicine, sheds light on these hidden dirty places and items.

Airport

"If you are at the [food court](#), I recommend wiping down the table you are sitting at because many people have sat at the table before you," Valdez said. "If you plan to go to a grab-and-go food shop, then it is a good idea to read the labels on the food so that you can make sure you are not eating food that has expired or that has been sitting out too long, which can cause food poisoning."

Since you will be in close proximity to many people at the airport, Valdez suggests washing your hands frequently and carrying a small bottle of travel-sized hand sanitizer.

She also said to be kind to your fellow travelers by covering your mouth or nose when coughing or sneezing and washing or sanitizing your hands as soon as you can.

Hotel Room

Items that can collect a lot of germs in hotel rooms include the remote control, the telephone, the desk area and the night stands. All of those areas may be quickly wiped down, but they may not be thoroughly cleaned.

You should carry small, travel friendly disinfectant wipes so you can wipe down those areas and items, Valdez said.

Bedroom

We shed [skin cells](#) throughout the day, and some of those skin cells may be dirty and get on our linens. Additionally, our hair can collect dust particles, which can accumulate over time on our pillow cases so it is a

good idea to wash and/or change linens and pillows cases regularly.

Valdez added that if you sleep on a dirty pillowcase and you have germs or [dust particles](#) in your hair and skin, this can promote bacterial growth on your skin that can lead to acne.

Gym

Many [germs](#) can be found at the gym because people are sweating and in close proximity to each other, Valdez said. However, many gyms are now equipped with disinfecting wipes so it is important to wipe down machines before and after using them. You should wipe down the equipment before for your safety and wipe them down after as a courtesy to other gym goers.

Valdez cautions against going to the gym when you are sick because it is extremely easy to expose more people to your illness.

You also should wear slippers in the shower at the gym because bacteria can grow and stick to the floor. The shower room floors can stay wet and hot, and these are the perfect conditions to pick up ringworm or athlete's foot. Valdez also recommends showering and changing into clean clothes as quickly as you can after exercising or using a hot tub so bacteria does not clog your pores and cause folliculitis.

Toothbrush

Studies have shown that you should keep your toothbrush as far away from the toilet as possible. These studies suggest that when you flush the toilet, water that has been contaminated can get in the air and spray upward, which can make some pathogens airborne. If your toothbrush is right next to your toilet, your toothbrush can be in the trajectory of

where some of that water will spray.

Remember to change your toothbrush every three months or as often as your dentist recommends. This ensures that bacteria that can cause gum or dental disease do not colonize over time.

Cell phones

"We drop our cell phones on the ground, we put them on many different surfaces, and we may even take them to the restroom so it is not surprising that our cell phones can be very germy," Valdez said. "For these reasons, you should frequently clean either your phone or phone cover with a damp lint-free cloth."

Water (if you are traveling abroad)

If you are traveling abroad, you may need to remember not to drink water straight from a fountain. Instead you should drink bottled water or water that has been sealed so that you do not expose yourself to pathogens that may be in the water. In these cases, it also is important to use bottled water to brush your teeth. You can use the water to wash your hands but then use hand sanitizer right after.

Provided by Baylor College of Medicine

Citation: Get the dirt on germs (2019, February 27) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2019-02-dirt-germs.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--