



Germ Warfare: Sanitizing Solutions for a Healthier Home

By Trudie Mitschang

FOR IMMUNE-COMPROMISED patients, keeping the home free from disease-causing microbes and germs is essential. While wiping down countertops and keeping bathroom debris at bay are common-sense practices, many other simple steps can be taken to ensure the home is a haven from the outside world's infectious organisms.

Pick the right products. Whether choosing traditional or “green” products for daily household chores, take note of whether the product is designed to disinfect or sanitize. Sanitizers are designed to remove 99 percent of bacteria within 30 seconds, while disinfectants are designed to kill all specified organisms within at least 10 minutes of product application. Certain household products already on hand such as chlorine bleach, rubbing alcohol and hydrogen peroxide can also be used to disinfect. Products with disinfectant capabilities can be easily identified by U.S. Environmental Protection Agency registration information on the packaging.

Target hard surfaces. Pay special attention to hard surfaces such as doorknobs, table tops, light switches, stair railings, chair backs and any other places hands tend to linger. Allow the disinfectant product to remain on surfaces for as long as necessary, then wipe the surfaces down with disposable towels. Be sure to grab a fresh towel each time you start wiping a new surface.

Disinfect electronic devices. In a 2013 study¹ that inspected 50 cell phones, 100 percent showed contaminable bacteria, and 90 percent reported the same bacteria on users' hands. Further, only 38 percent of participants cleaned their devices weekly. To disinfect handheld devices, spray a commercial spray disinfectant or a 50/50 solution of rubbing alcohol and water on a microfiber cloth and wipe down all surfaces front and back.

Remove shoes. In Japan, where it is a custom to remove shoes before entering a home, life expectancy is one of the highest in the world. Coincidence? Some studies have analyzed a typical household floor where residents did not remove shoes, and results showed rampant amounts of bacteria, including animal feces, urine, petrochemicals, viruses and pesticides. An alternative to leaving footwear in the entryway, an antimicrobial doormat can remove and trap debris, dust mites and other allergens from the bottom of shoes.

Vacuum often. A canister-style vacuum cleaner can remove pet dander, lead and everyday dirt from the carpet, and most come with a built-in HEPA (high efficiency particulate air) filter that captures lung-irritating air pollutants. A sanitizing vacuum with

UVC light technology is another excellent way to reduce germs and deodorize furniture and mattress fabrics. Laboratory tests have shown sanitizing vacuums have the ability to eliminate MRSA and the H1N1 flu virus, as well as combat certain molds and allergens without the use of chemicals.

Disinfect laundry. Household linens, towels and clothes can harbor infectious bacteria for weeks and perpetuate the cycle of disease in the home. For thorough cleansing, soak soiled items in an oxygen-bleach powder solution before putting them in the washing machine. Then, wash them using laundry detergent and the warmest water as recommended on an item's label.

Unmask hidden mold. Mold buildup in homes can cause allergic reactions in one in every three people, and significantly aggravate asthma and other breathing problems. Telltale signs of mold include faint musty smells and, of course, visible spots, even if they are small. Chronic physical symptoms such as sneezing, coughing, dry eyes or rashes could also indicate it is time to schedule a mold inspection.

Environmentally conscious options. Without shelling out a lot of green to get green products, consider all-natural household products that can double as standby sanitation solutions:

- **White vinegar.** This multi-tasker contains acetic acid, which gives it antimicrobial properties and is great for killing mold. Use it diluted with water to clean hard surfaces, disinfect sinks and toilets, and wash produce.
- **Tea tree oil.** This all-natural essential oil is naturally antibacterial, antifungal and antiseptic. A few drops added to water makes an effective natural cleanser for countertops and tile, and is also good for disinfecting pet accidents.
- **Hydrogen peroxide.** This natural product is a great stain remover for carpets and clothes and, in conjunction with vinegar, is an excellent scum buster for tub and tile. And unlike vinegar, it doesn't have a noticeable smell.

Living with a compromised immune system, germ warfare can feel like a full-time job. By stocking the right products and maintaining vigilant cleaning habits, a home can be bacteria-free and sanitized, while protecting the health of all family members. ■

Reference

1. Beckstrom, AC, Cleman, PE, Cassis-Ghavami, FL, and Kamitsuka, MD. Surveillance Study of Bacterial Contamination of the Parent's Cell Phone in the NICU and the Effectiveness of an Anti-Microbial Gel in Reducing Transmission to the Hands. *Journal of Perinatology*, 2013;33(12):960-963. Accessed at www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/24008502.

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Germ-Free Texting

CleanTex Phone Wipe disinfectant pads are premoistened germicidal wipes that kill most germs on hard, nonporous surfaces. They are manufactured to kill all non-spore-forming bacterial strains, including Staphylococcus aureus, Pseudomonas aeruginosa and

Salmonella choleraesuis. Box of 72 pads; \$20.40; Amazon.com



Breathe Easier

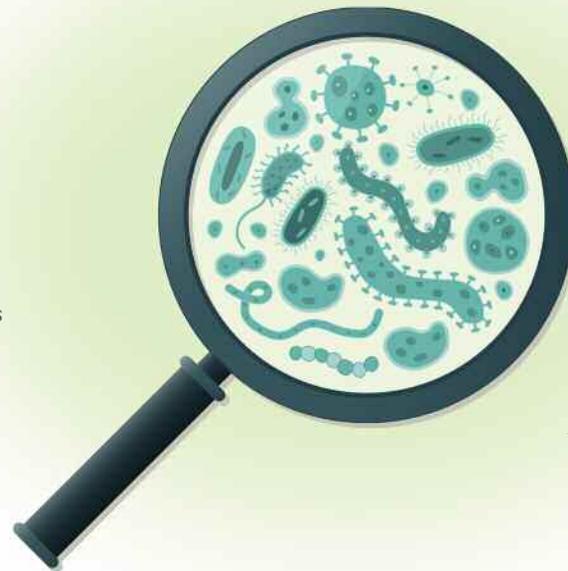
The Advanced HEPA+ Jr air purifier is a medical-Grade HEPA filter plus 6.5 pounds of activated carbon that is designed to remove 99.97 percent of harmful particles, odors, gases and fumes from rooms up to 700 square feet. It is available in four colors. \$399; www.natallergy.com



Banish Laundry Bacteria

Lysol Laundry Sanitizer is specially designed to sanitize clothes and can kill 99.9 percent of bacteria that detergents don't address. It works in cold water, is safe for whites and colors and can be used in standard and high-efficiency machines. 41 fluid ounces; 5.99; Target.com

Shopping Guide to Sanitizers



Eliminate Microscopic Pests

The UV Vacuum kills bed bugs and dust mites and is suitable for use on mattresses, sofas, pillows, curtains, rugs and carpets, or anywhere bacteria can live. It can be used as a handheld vacuum or a full-length vacuum cleaner using the in-built telescopic handle. \$79.99; Amazon.com



Keep Mold at Bay

My Mold Detective is a professional-grade and do-it-yourself mold test kit that utilizes the same method used by industry professionals to sample air quality in homes and businesses. The kit identifies what types of mold are present and determines whether mold concentration levels are normal, slightly elevated or elevated. Two-room test kit; \$64.99; Homedepot.com



Freshen Up Floors

The Dr. Doormat all-season utility mat is infused with an antimicrobial formula that creates a positive charge to disable microorganisms like bacteria, fungus and mold on contact. It comes in two sizes. \$26.99-\$46.99; www.drdoormat.com

