



# Germ-Proof Your Home

Someone's sick? Don't panic. Here's how to help your household get well—fast

## Tools You'll Use

- Disinfecting spray
- Rubbing alcohol, cotton balls
- Washer, dryer
- Bleach
- Dishwasher

## Biggest Challenges

- 1 Dirty doorknobs and touch points
- 2 Germy linens, couch pillows, and throws
- 3 Used dishes, toothbrushes, and tissues

## Fastest Fixes

**1 Get a grip on handles** Some of the germiest places in the house are the hot spots everyone touches: doorknobs, faucet levers, appliance handles, etc. Bacteria and viruses can live on these for up to 48 hours. Zap them with surface-disinfecting sprays that are EPA-registered (check the label)—products that kill the influenza A virus on hard surfaces will also be effective against the H1N1 flu strain. But note: The area should be clean of visible dirt or gunk and needs to stay wet with the disinfectant for the length of time listed on the

label—if it dries too quickly, do a second pass. Germs are killed during evaporation, so let air-dry. For no-wet items, like remote controls, light switches, or phones, saturate a cotton ball with rubbing alcohol; squeeze out and swab surfaces carefully so no liquid gets inside.

**2 Do a bed check** While plenty of rest helps cure a cold, it also leaves bedding and sofa accessories in need of a good washing. Scoop up sheets and pillowcases, as well as bathroom towels, and launder them in hot water. To dry, choose the antibacterial cycle, if your dryer has one; otherwise, use the highest temperature setting. For sofa throws, pillows, and covers, launder according to label directions (for nonwashable fabrics, spritz with a fabric-safe disinfectant spray, but test in a hidden spot first). Wash your hands after touching soiled linens. Because bacteria can remain in the washer, it's a good idea to de-bug the machine by running a normal hot-water cycle (minus clothes) with a dose of bleach added.

**3 Tackle the other ickies** Your instinct might be to meticulously clean the dishes, but the CDC says you don't need to: Just wash them as usual in the dishwasher, or in the sink with hot water and dish soap. It's smart to get the sick person a new toothbrush (which should be replaced every three months anyway). The bigger concern: dirty tissues. Empty wastebaskets and go over the bins with disinfecting wipes or spray, or run small plastic ones through a dishwasher cycle.

## Make It Easier Next Time

- Place bottles of alcohol-based (at least 60 percent) hand sanitizer in convenient locations around the house to encourage use in addition to frequent hand-washing.
- Assign the patient a specific hand towel or, even simpler, use paper ones.
- Line wastebaskets with plastic bags—or put out paper bags in the bed, bath, and living rooms as tissue receptacles—for easy disposal.

—Carolyn Forté, GHRI director, home care

