

The 101 Dirtiest Things We Touch



Protect yourself from getting sick: Disinfect items and wash your hands

It is no surprise that our world is filled with millions of germs. Some germs are both wanted and important. In fact, we have populations of germs that live on our skin and inside our bodies that are essential for life. This group of microbes and germs is collectively called the microbiome and will be the subject of a future article.

Unfortunately, many germs are not essential to us and are downright dangerous for our health. Many of these germs live on ordinary, everyday objects that we use all the time. The most important thing you can do for good health is to wash your hands on a regular basis.

Some of the items around us we would expect to be dirty. Some of the other things around us may be very dirty, and the list of them may come as a complete surprise. Even if you are not a total germaphobe, when we look at the list of 101 of the dirtiest things we encounter and touch every day, it should make us more motivated to wash our hands regularly.

The List

1. Airports security bins
2. Armrests at public places like theatres, doctor's offices, lecture halls, airplanes and other forms of public transportation (including the food trays that are stored in airplane armrests)
3. Appliance control knobs and handles, drawer handles, especially in the kitchen.
4. ATM buttons
5. Banisters at home and in stairwells
6. Bar games (pinball buttons, video game buttons, darts, hockey game handles, etc.)
7. Bathtubs
8. Bathroom door handles, especially inside, leading out
9. Bathroom sink faucet handles
10. Bowling balls (free loaners at the alley)
11. Car interior controls including: shifter knobs, radio, climate control, seatbelt buckles and touchscreens
12. Carpeting
13. Casino dice
14. Cell phones
15. Children's toys
16. Coffee mugs at restaurants
17. Coffee pot handles and all things commonly touched in the office break room
18. Computer keyboard
19. Computer mouse
20. Copy and fax machine buttons
21. Credit cards
22. Crosswalk buttons
23. CPAP masks and keypad
24. Diaper changing stations
25. Doorknobs
26. Door handles
27. Doorbell buttons
28. Drinking glasses at bars and restaurants
29. Drinking fountains
30. Elevator buttons
31. Escalator handrails
32. Eyeglasses
33. Fruit (like limes) squeezed into cocktails, beer and other drinks. Often, the bartenders are in a hurry and grab the lime or other fruit slices and with their bare hands. Then they squeeze and drop the fruit down into your drink. The germs from their fingers are now on the fruit that is floating in your drink or Mexican beer. As one person said, when they squeeze fruit with their bare hands and drop it into you drink/beer, it is the same as going into the bar and asking the bartender if you can lick their fingers. Oh my.

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34. Gaming controls
35. Garage remote controls in our cars and on the garage wall
36. Gas pump handles
37. Grill handles
38. Hairbrush handles
39. Handles on subways and trams that are used to hold on to when the vehicle is moving
40. Handshakes
41. Hearing aids and eyeglass frames
42. Hot tubs
43. Hot and cold-water dispenser knobs/levers
44. Hotel room telephones
45. Keys
46. Kitchen sink
47. Kitchen sink sponges and towels
48. Kitchen towels
49. Laundry can be: Use bleach on whites, hot water washes, and long hot, dry cycles
50. Light switches
51. Litter boxes
52. Locker door handles at the gym
53. Loofa sponges
54. Lunch boxes
55. Magazines in reception rooms
56. McDonalds play areas
57. McDonald play area plastic balls
58. Money: coins and paper, (and the automatic metal coin trays that change rolls into when you pay with cash at stores that you grab your change out of)
59. Mailbox handles
60. Microwave keypads
61. Office telephones and telephone receivers
62. Paper towel dispenser levers
63. Parking meters
64. Pens on a cord or chain (like at the bank) or the stylus pen at the credit card signing station
65. Pet toys
66. Pet dishes
67. Pet leashes
68. Playground equipment, inside and outside
69. Poles on subways and trams that are used to hold on to when the vehicle is moving
70. Produce: All produce is covered with germs and should be washed off even if you plan on peeling it before eating it. And to wash produce off, it needs to be scrubbed with a special produce brush, not just rinsed under flowing water.
71. Public bathrooms: inside stall latches
72. Purses
73. Railings in stairways
74. Refrigerator door handles
75. Restaurant menus
76. Restaurant salt and pepper shakers and table condiment containers
77. Restaurant table tops (especially if wiped down with a sponge or cloth from the same tub of water used over and over, or the sponge or cloth is used repeatedly on all tables)
78. Restaurant utensils and dishes (Studies have shown that almost all restaurant silverware has detectable amounts of norovirus, E. coli, and Listeria.) including shared utensils to serve food at buffets
79. Security door keypads
80. Security system alarm programming pads
81. Self-checkout stands at the store
82. Shoes, especially the bottoms
83. Slot machine buttons
84. Soap dispenser buttons
85. Sports balls (basketballs, volleyballs, footballs, etc.)
86. Sports equipment at the gym (bikes, treadmills, weights)
87. Steering wheels (cars)
88. Stove and oven control knobs
89. Shopping cart handles
90. Shower handles
91. Testers (e.g. make up) and sample jars at stores
92. Toilet seats
93. Toilet flush handles/levers
94. Toothbrush and toothbrush holders
95. Touchscreens
96. TV remote controls
97. Urinal flush handles
98. Vending machine buttons
99. Wallets
100. Water bottles that are regularly refilled
101. Straps on subways and trams that are used to hold on to when the vehicle is moving

Many of the things around us can and should be cleaned on a regular basis. Most things should be cleaned daily or weekly. Use a commercial disinfectant spray or wipe according to directions.

For cell phones, use a microfiber cloth and a 70 percent isopropyl alcohol solution. You can't clean everything, so your best defense for good health is to wash your hands regularly and especially after touching the items listed above.

For a great article on proper hand washing, please see our previous column: Spokesman-Recorder, July 26, 2017 <http://spokesman-recorder.com/2017/07/26/want-prevent-illness-disease-wash-hands/>

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