

SICK AGAIN?



Your mother always told you: Wash your hands; never drink from someone else's cup; if something falls on the floor, don't put it in your mouth.

Mom was right, of course, for disease-causing germs can lurk anywhere. They can even abound in "soap-and-water clean" households, often hiding in places where you might least expect them—including doorknobs, light switches and remote-control devices. The invisible critters can hitch a ride home on your hands and on items you've brought in from work or the supermarket. Your children can also carry them home from school.

Although not all household germs will make you sick, in great enough numbers some can cause problems ranging from the common cold and stomach upsets to more serious illnesses, such as hepatitis A.

Unfortunately, routine cleaning won't kill all germs. But you don't have to spend hours scrubbing and disinfecting, either. Infection-control experts recommend focusing on the "disease zones"—the biggest household breeding grounds for the bugs that can make your family sick.

HOUSEHOLD-WIDE HAZARDS

Hot Spots: Frequently touched objects such as light switches, doorknobs, countertops, banisters, stair rails, telephone receivers and remote-control devices. **Contaminants:** The cold virus can live for up to 24 hours on many hard surfaces. Studies show that you're more likely to catch a cold by touching a contaminated surface and then touching your eyes, nose or mouth, than by inhaling the virus when someone sneezes or coughs. *Rotavirus*, which causes diarrhea, can live on surfaces for days or weeks. Kids often bring this fecal-borne bug home from school or day care and deposit it on surfaces throughout the house. Family members who touch these surfaces may then put their hands near their mouths or may handle food and inadvertently ingest the organism. **Solutions:** ● Clean the surfaces listed above with a disinfectant cleanser that's registered with the Environmental Protection Agency. (Printed on the label will be "EPA" followed by a number, meaning the product has been proven to kill bacteria and/or viruses. Some labels also list the specific germs the product kills.) ● Once a week after cleaning (more often if someone is sick), use a disinfectant spray containing roughly 70 to 80 percent *ethanol* and about 1 percent *phenol*. These ingredients are particularly effective at killing a wide range of bacteria. Let disinfectant stand for 10



minutes, then wipe with a damp paper towel and allow to air-dry.

Hot Spots: Damp basement walls and floors, humidifiers, vaporizers, air-conditioners, areas under sinks.

Contaminants: Mold and mildew, a major cause of allergies, thrive in damp places. So does *staphylococcus aureus*, a bacterium that can cause impetigo and other skin infections as well as gastrointestinal problems (if ingested). *Streptococcus*, another moisture-loving bacterium, causes strep throat and, less commonly, impetigo. **Solutions:** ● Waterproof your basement. ● Empty your vaporizer or portable humidifier every day, larger humidifiers as recommended by manufacturer. Use and clean according to manufacturer's instructions. ● Ventilate your home so airborne germs will be rapidly dispersed. ● Have your heating and cooling system professionally cleaned annually. Clean air vents regularly.

Hot Spot: Bedding and other household fabrics. **Contaminant:** *Ektoparasites* such as scabies and lice that cause rashes and other skin problems can live in sheets, blankets, pillows and mattresses. Dust mites, a common trigger of allergies, live in carpeting, bedding—including mattresses and pillows—and other household fabrics.

Solutions: To get rid of scabies and lice and to reduce dust buildup, wash bedding in hot water (Continued)

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