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GUEST ARTICLE: UNITED CONCORDIA DENTAL

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Surprisingly Germy Surfaces

By now, we all know to wash our hands for 20 seconds and apply hand sanitizer to protect ourselves from germs. But even after you disinfect your digits, touching some of these filthy familiar items can undo that diligent cleansing. Germs can easily transfer from your fingers and hands to your eyes, mouth and nose – and make you sick.

Here's a list of everyday items you'll want to keep squeaky clean:

- **Your cell phone:** Research shows your cell phone is 10 times dirtier than a toilet seat! ¹ Wiping the phone with a microfiber cloth removes most germs. For a deeper clean, mix 3 parts water to 2 parts rubbing alcohol. Dampen a cloth with the solution, then wipe down the entire phone.
- **Restaurant menus:** Just think how many hands have opened that menu before you. Studies show that E. coli and staph are often present on the surface – especially on the plastic ones. ² So make sure to wash your hands after ordering, or rub with sanitizer before you eat.
- **The kitchen sponge:** According to the National Sanitation Foundation, more than 75% of dish sponges have Salmonella, E. coli and fecal matter. ³ To kill bacteria, heat damp sponges in the microwave for a minute, or soak them in a quart of warm water with ½ tsp. concentrated bleach. And, just like you replace your toothbrush, get a new sponge every week or two.
- **Bathroom towels:** Towels that hang in dark, damp bathrooms – near the toilet! – offer prime real estate for bacteria growth. One study showed that 90% were contaminated after a few days of use. ⁴ Wash towels in hot water about every two days. And since regular detergent won't kill all bacteria, use one that contains activated oxygen bleach.
- **Microwave handle:** Almost 50% of microwave handles have such high bacteria levels, they're considered high risk for spreading illnesses. ⁵ Spray the door, handle and touch pad with glass cleaner and wipe dry with a paper towel. Or rub surfaces down with a disinfecting wipe.

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- **Makeup applicators:** Touching your mascara wand, blush brush or eyeshadow sponge spreads germs from your hands, and swiping dirty tools near your eyes, nose and mouth can lead to breakouts, pink eye and fungal infections.⁶ So wash beauty tools after every use. Squeeze out sponges with bar soap and hot water, and wash brushes with gentle dish soap or baby shampoo.
- **Inside the washer:** Warm, wet laundry that's not promptly thrown in the dryer can start to get germ. If your clothes sit for more than 30 minutes, wash them a second time with hot water. If you go to a laundromat, wipe out the washer drum with a disinfecting wipe first.

Sources:

1. Time.com; Your cell phone is 10 times dirtier than a toilet seat. Here's what to do about it; August 23, 2017.
2. Journal of Food: Microbiology, Safety & Hygiene: "Pathogen Persistence in Restaurant Menus: Comparison Between Materials"; January 2016.
3. thehealthy.com This is how often you should replace your kitchen sponge, And what happens when you don't; May 2020.
4. time.com; Your towels are way dirtier than you think; September 2017.
5. cookinglight.com; You're probably not cleaning this filthy surface – and you really should be; December 2018.
6. Bustle.com; This will convince you to wash your makeup brushes; February 2016.