Living Healthy

By Renee Proefke



3 Secret Hideouts of the Dreaded Germ

Where do germs lurk, and can you really avoid them? Here are a few of their favorite hiding spots, as well as ways you can protect yourself against them.

1. Ketchup tastes great on fries, but hold the germs. Think about it—when was the last time you saw someone at a restaurant clean a ketchup bottle? According to public health researcher Dr. Kelly Reynolds, most people don't wash their hands before eating. So it stands to reason that any time you touch something that many others have touched and isn't cleaned regularly (if at all), your hands pick up a batch of strange germs.

   Keep It Clean: Reynolds says napkins won't help. They're too porous, and microorganisms can go right through them. Instead, squirt hand sanitizer on the outside of the ketchup bottle, or use a disinfectant wipe before you grab it. You can also use hand sanitizer or—even better—wash your hands before and after eating.

2. Your purse could be making you sick. Never, ever place your purse on the bathroom floor! According to microbiologist Chuck Gerba, based on his research on where organisms that make us sick lurk, thousands of bacteria gather on the outside of a woman's purse—especially on its bottom. One woman in his research group had 6.7 million individual bacteria on the surface of her handbag!

   Keep It Clean: Hang your purse on the stall itself, and once a week clean both the inside and outside of your purse with a disinfectant wipe or spray. There are also special dry-cleaning services to help you clean your handbags and purses. Researchers recommend you send them for cleaning every six months.

3. Talk about germs. Whether you use an office, home or mobile phone, researchers from the University of Arizona found that telephones actually can be more contaminated than toilet seats. Cell phone handsets have been found to be home to more than 18 times the number of harmful germs present on the handle of your toilet.

   Keep It Clean: For items such as cell phones, it might be safer to use a disinfecting wipe (turn the phone off before cleaning), and be sure to follow any specific safety instructions.

Did You Know? According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the H1N1 flu virus, other viruses, and staphylococcus bacteria and e-coli can remain on commonly used items for eight hours or more.

This article is provided for information only. Contact a medical professional with any health-related questions or concerns. **Sources:** The Centers for Disease Control, HealingWell.com and Prevention.com.