



**APUA**

# Creating a healthy household environment

## For Consumers

*A Quick Reference Sheet from the Alliance for the Prudent Use of Antibiotics*

### Keeping your family healthy

Keeping the environment of your home healthy is easier than you might expect, and it won't take as much time out of your busy schedule as you might think. Making sure you and your family wash your hands often is one of the most important things you can do to reduce the risk of infections. However, there are a few more steps you should take to make sure your home is a healthy environment for everyone that lives or visits there.



#### Cleaning your home

***APUA recommends that you pay the most attention to the following 5 types of places when cleaning:***

- ◆ **Kitchen counters:** Make sure the counter is clean before putting any food you are preparing on it. Most of the time, it is okay to just wash it with soap and water using a clean sponge. Always wash your counter after preparing food too.
- ◆ **Dishes and the kitchen sponge:** Use a sponge or dish rag to wash your dishes with hot water and dish soap (no need to get the antibacterial kind). When you are done, wet the sponge, ring it out, and put it in the microwave for one minute.
- ◆ **Cutting boards:** It is best to have two cutting boards, one that you never use for anything but meat, and another that you only use for vegetables, fruits, and other types of food that you don't have to cook to eat safely. Always wash cutting boards with soap and water and rinse well after each use.
- ◆ **Bathroom counters:** For routine cleaning, simple cleaners or soap and water are often enough. However, you should pay attention to what gets laid down on the counter. For example, if you're cleaning up a cut, and set down an old bandage, you'll want to do some targeted disinfection there. Follow the same rules as you would for a kitchen counter.
- ◆ **Places that people touch often:** The places in your house that have the most germs on them are usually the ones that people touch with their hands the most—like doorknobs, refrigerator handles, light switches, telephones, and computer keyboards—all things that people usually forget about when they clean their homes. You shouldn't feel that you need to constantly disinfect these items, but include them in routine cleaning.



# Healthy Families, Healthy Homes

## APUA

### **What should I know about routine cleaning, apart from the need to pay special attention to the surfaces that were already mentioned?**

**Bacteria and viruses aren't the only things that can cause health problems. Dust and mold are also concerns. To keep them under control:**

- *Vacuum carpets every week.*
- *Routinely use non-residue producing disinfectants for bathtubs, shower curtains, sinks, and other areas that are often wet.*
- *If you have a ventilation fan in your bathroom, make sure to turn it on whenever you use the shower, as it helps keep mold from growing.*

*What does the term "good bacteria" mean?*

*There are more bacterial cells in your body than human cells. Most of these bacteria are not harmful, and many of them are actually good for you! Such bacteria live in your intestines, your mouth, and on your skin, and they help you in many ways. For instance, if you have a lot of "good" bacteria living in your intestines, it is harder for "bad" bacteria to overgrow and make you sick. The bacteria also make some nutrients that your body needs, like vitamin K.*

### **Is it possible to be too clean?**

That's a good question, and it isn't one that anyone has a definite answer to yet. There are some scientific studies that show that children who grow up with more exposure to soil and bacteria in the environment are less likely to get asthma or allergies. The idea that these early exposures have this effect is sometimes called the "hygiene hypothesis." However, there are other scientific studies that don't show a very strong relationship between allergies and being "too clean."

If you are worried about exposing your family to too many cleaners and disinfectants, antibacterial soap is a good thing to cut out. Using it won't help keep your family from getting sick, and since it stays on your hands for awhile after you are done washing them, it may kill some of the "good" bacteria on your body. The same goes for antimicrobial dish soap, toothpaste, and other products that have ingredients like triclosan added to them.

For more information please visit the International Scientific Forum on Home Hygiene:  
<http://www.ifh-homehygiene.org/>



**Established in 1981, the Alliance for the Prudent Use of Antibiotics (APUA) is an international non-governmental organization dedicated to preserving the effectiveness of antibiotics and other antimicrobials.**

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