

Bacteria in the Kitchen

We tend to overlook the fact that kitchen surfaces are the ideal environment for bacterial growth. Even though the surfaces may appear clean, they may still harbor invisible bacteria such as Salmonella and E coli. Sponges and rags, countertops and cutting boards are common kitchen surfaces where bacteria can thrive.

Sponges and Rags



Sponges and rags are the most overlooked environment for germ infestation. The cellulose sponge is ideal for bacterial growth. Here bacteria have a surface to cling to, a supply of nutrients and moisture. This is exactly what they need to thrive. Bacteria can survive at least two days on a sponge as it slowly dries. On dry surfaces, bacteria can survive no more than a few hours, but this is long enough to infect another food source or a person's hand during meal preparation.

Countertops and Cutting Boards

Bacteria live in the small cracks and crevices of countertops and cutting boards. Once colonies are established, they can produce film that actually protects them from being dislodged. These colonies can withstand a spray of water, a little rubbing or a mild detergent solution.

There is good news!

Kitchen bacteria can be destroyed by proper cleaning. Surfaces must be cleaned and sanitized to destroy bacteria. A good scrubbing with a detergent solution is the first step followed by a sanitizing rinse. In the household, a dilute solution of bleach will destroy the bacteria. A good sanitizing solution for hard, nonporous surfaces is 2 teaspoons liquid bleach in 1 gallon of water.

It is estimated that about 76 million Americans contact some sort of foodborne illness annually. Careful food handling and proper kitchen sanitation can destroy bacteria that causes foodborne illness. Take the necessary steps to ensure that your family is not at risk.

Sources:

- Germs are Hidden Everywhere
- Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation - Environmental Sanitation and Food Safety
Patty Myers, Research Associate
- University of Florida, Food Science and Human Nutrition Food Safety Listserve, Gainesville, Florida