

## **Swipe and wipe | Bathroom health risks (Print)**

It's not just a waste of time anymore.

Now, health professionals are warning the public about a number of health concerns that can come with sitting on the toilet too long and scrolling on your cell phone.

### **Leave the phone at the door**

Many people have gotten into the habit of taking their phone into the bathroom with them and scrolling TikTok or Instagram while they do their business. Kaylin Heinz, an infection preventionist RN at OSF HealthCare, recommends making the mental decision to not even take your phone with you.

"With you sitting on your phone and looking through TikToks, everyone probably knows that with social media, you look at it for a minute, and next thing you know it's been 30 minutes or an hour. So, I think it's a good idea to just not bring your phone in. Or if you are, just keep it to a minimum," Heinz says.

She adds if your phone tags along to the toilet with you, wipe it down with disinfectant wipes.

### **Bacteria, fungi and viruses, oh my!**

A simple flush doesn't get rid of the nastiness that is common in the restroom. Especially with bathrooms that have showers and bathtubs in them, the moisture in the room can lead to bacteria, fungi and virus growth, not just inside the toilet, but on all bathroom surfaces. Heinz calls these surfaces a "breeding ground" for germs.

Heinz says it's important to consider every step of the process, from entering the bathroom to flushing the toilet to washing your hands. Where can the germs be? Are you really cleaning your hands?

"With sitting and scrolling, you're sitting there for long periods. Your hands are probably dirty before you go to the bathroom, because you're typically not washing your hands before you go to the bathroom. Then when you're sitting on the toilet, you're probably setting your phone down on a surface area that has germs," Heinz says. "Then you'll wash your hands, which you'll typically think your hands are clean, but they're not. Then you wash your hands and pick up the phone that was on the surface with germs, and now your hands are dirty again. And you're picking up the germs, taking them elsewhere, and spreading them to other people."

### **Save the toothbrushes!**

Does your toothbrush hang out on the bathroom counter? You might want to rethink that.

"If you keep your toothbrush on the counter, it likely has fecal matter on it. So, I would definitely put your toothbrush away or switch it often and clean it," Heinz says.

### **Stop the spread | Toilet style**

Here's a habit change you can consider. Instead of flushing the toilet and just walking away, close the lid before you flush and keep the germs inside.

"Definitely make sure when you're flushing the toilet, go ahead and close the lid. That's going to minimize the number of germs that are spraying all over your bathroom and aerosolizing," Heinz says.

Heinz adds another fun fact about the dirtiness of toilets -- the minerals in the water. She says the minerals in toilet water can get stuck to the toilet bowl, which can also be a breeding ground for germs.

## Clean up, clean up, everybody do their share!

Heinz recommends cleaning your bathroom at least once a week. If someone is sick, she says to clean it once a day, including using disinfectant wipes on all surfaces.

If you're sick with a virus, your urine and feces can have the virus in them, which keeps the virus living and growing in the toilet longer.

Heinz recommends researching different products and reading over the spray labels, as some can interact with dust or debris, causing them to go into the air. She says if you prefer using wipes but only have spray at the moment, spray a paper towel first and then wipe the surface. She suggests using products with bleach in them, but to never mix chemicals.

"If you're uncertain about a product, consider spot testing it first, as some finishes can be damaged," Heinz adds.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends the surface you're wiping stays wet the entire time of contact to make sure germs are killed. You should clean surfaces with water and soap and scrub them before sanitizing or disinfecting them.

According to the [CDC](#), "**Cleaning** *removes* most germs, dirt, and impurities from surfaces. Clean with water, soap and scrubbing. **Sanitizing** *reduces* germs to levels public health codes or regulations consider safe. Sanitizing is done with weaker bleach solutions or sanitizing sprays. Clean surfaces before you sanitize them.

**Disinfecting** *kills* most germs on surfaces and objects. Disinfecting is done with stronger bleach solutions or chemicals."