

Spring Clean Your Way to a Safer Kitchen



Already the days are longer and there is hope of spring to come. As you tackle those spring cleaning projects, it's a great time to target harmful bacteria that can lurk on kitchen surfaces and even in your refrigerator. *Salmonella*, *Staphylococcus*, *E. coli* and *Listeria* are just some of the bacteria that may be hanging out in your kitchen. While you can't see or smell bacteria and other microorganisms -- they are everywhere, and they especially like moist environments. A clean and dry kitchen helps fight harmful microorganisms and can help protect you and your family from foodborne illness. And in these tough economic times, a clean, well-functioning kitchen can help keep food from spoiling so less is thrown away. The University of Wisconsin-Extension recommends the following spring cleaning tips to make your kitchen and your meals safer:

- **Clean kitchen surfaces, pots, pans, and utensils with warm, soapy water.**
Food particles and dirt can harbor germs, so be sure to remove all food and dirt from kitchen surfaces and cookware. Use some 'elbow grease' if you need to. Plain dish soap and water is best- there is no need to use an antibacterial soap. Soap is designed to lift dirt off surfaces, sometimes with scrubbing, and warm water will help soap to work most effectively. There isn't any need to use very hot water; cold water will work in a pinch.
- **Rinse surfaces, pots, pans and utensils to remove dirt and soapy residue.**
Use warm, running water to rinse away food particles, dirt, and soapy residue. As you rinse away dirt and soap, germs will also be washed away.
- **Sanitize rinsed surfaces to kill remaining germs.**
Once surfaces, pots, pans and utensils have been washed and rinsed, it's a good idea to follow up with a sanitizing step. Counter tops, pots, pans, utensils and appliance surfaces may be sanitized with a dilute chlorine bleach solution or a disinfectant kitchen cleaner. To make a chlorine bleach solution of proper strength, use just 1 teaspoon bleach to 1 quart of water. Wipe or spray this solution onto surfaces. Let the solution stand for a few minutes; then blot dry with clean paper towels. Or allow the solution to air dry. Kitchen surfaces will be 'spring clean' and free of microorganisms.
- **Disinfect dishcloths and towels.**
Launder dishcloths and towels for spring cleaning, and every day, using the hot water cycle of the washing machine. Then be sure to dry them in the dryer. Dishcloths harbor microorganisms and, when wet, promote microbial growth. When possible, use paper towels to wipe up kitchen spills, especially spills from raw meat or eggs.
- **Rid your refrigerator and freezer of spills, bacteria, yeast and mold.**
Have your refrigerator and freezer a good spring cleaning to kill germs that could cause foods to spoil or become harmful. To tackle bacteria, yeast, and mold, clean interior refrigerator surfaces with warm, soapy water. Rinse with a damp cloth; dry with a clean cloth.

Manufacturers recommend against using chlorine bleach as it can damage seals, gaskets and linings. Or try baking soda to clean kitchen appliances. Mix 2 Tablespoons of baking soda with 1 quart of warm water. Use this cleaner to clean inside the refrigerator, the microwave oven and other small appliances. Wipe with a clean, dry cloth for a clean, residue-free appliance. A clean, dry refrigerator will keep food fresher longer! Defrost your freezer, as necessary, and remove food particles or spills. Clean and dry all surfaces. Make sure your refrigerator temperature is set to 32°-40°F; your freezer to 0°F or below.

Because chlorine bleach is an easy and inexpensive sanitizer to use, here are some extra hints on effectively using chlorine bleach:

- Mix 1 teaspoon bleach per quart of warm water in a spray bottle. Spray surfaces such as countertops and cutting boards with this bleach solution and allow to air dry. If you choose to dry surfaces with a towel, then allow the bleach spray to remain on the surface for at least 30 seconds.
- Mix 1 Tablespoon bleach per gallon of warm water in a sink or pail. Allow pots, pans and utensils to soak in the dilute bleach solution for 2 minutes. Drain, and allow to air dry. Do not add more bleach than is recommended, and be sure to start off with a surface that has been washed and rinsed, or the bleach will not be effective.
- This type of dilute chlorine bleach solution can be stored in a closed container such as a spray bottle for up to one week. If you mix a bleach solution in an open pail or sink, be sure to freshen the solution at least once every 2 hours, or more often as needed. Every spring brings a chance to review food safety tips that will keep you and your family healthy. Contact your local University of Wisconsin Extension office for food safety information all year round.



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