

Give Your...

KITCHEN *a Checkup*

It may be the most popular room in your house, but it's also the germiest, harboring such health hazards as bacteria-ridden scrubbers and contaminated counters. Use this cheat sheet to ID the hot spots and make sure the space is in tip-top shape.



→THE SINK

“Second only to your sponge, the sink is the dirtiest thing in your kitchen,” says Philip Tierno, Ph.D., clinical professor of microbiology and pathology at NYU Langone Medical Center and author of *The Secret Life of Germs*. He recommends cleaning the basin, drain, faucet, and handles with a mild bleach mixture (one shot glass of bleach to half a quart of water), particularly after working with raw meat, poultry, or fish, which can introduce illness-causing bugs like *E. coli* and salmonella. Regularly disinfect sponges by microwaving them in a bowl of water for one minute.

→THE COUNTERTOPS

Minimize dirt by keeping pets and everyday items like handbags off them, and remember to use cutting boards for meal preparation. Before and after cooking, wipe down counters with the bleach solution above or an antibacterial cleanser suitable for your surface.

→THE FRIDGE

The best way to avoid spoilage—and food poisoning—is to keep it at 40°F or cooler, says Melissa Dobbins, R.D., a Chicago-based nutritionist and spokesperson for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. So use a digital refrigerator thermometer (available at grocery stores for about \$6) to check the temp frequently. Store eggs and milk on an inside shelf (studies have shown that the door may get too warm for these items because it's opened often). Wrap raw meats and poultry tightly to prevent cross-contamination, and seal leftovers in airtight containers labeled with the date they were prepared. Wondering if that three-day-old pizza is still edible? Find out by downloading the free *Is My Food Safe?* app at homefoodsafety.org/app.

→THE DISHWASHER

“When washing dishes, the water has to be very hot, ideally 150°F, to effectively kill bacteria,” says Tierno. To play it safe—especially after a family member has been sick—select the “sanitize” or “high-temperature” cycle, and make sure your water heater is cranked up. Once a month, clean the rubber seal encasing the door (and scrub away any film or dark spots inside the machine) with the diluted bleach solution; research has found that 62 percent of dishwashers contain some form of fungi. —ABIGAIL LIBERS