## The Dirty Truth

A 2019 report examining the gaps and potential risks in U.S. cleaning habits.

## Overview

Good cleaning habits are no longer a nicety. With the rise of bacterial superbugs, they've become a means of survival.

The average person comes into contact with over 60,000 different types of bacteria daily. In 2019, that can include antibiotic resistant bacteria that kills 700,000 people per year globally and is projected tocontribute to over 10 million deaths by 2050.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), antibiotic resistant bacteria can be found in strains of Staphylococcus (staph), MRSA, Streptococcus pneumoniae (cause of pneumonia and bacterial meningitis) and even foodborne illnesses such as Salmonella and Escherichia coli (E-coli). This bacteria can remain active for up to a day on hard surfaces including stainless steel and plastic, making everything from our kitchen counters to TV remotes a breeding ground for disease.

So how do people's cleaning habits help to combat the spread of bacteria and superbugs? Are our dirty behaviors more than just cringe worthy by impacting our health and putting the most vulnerable populations in our communities in danger? To answer these questions, we polled 1,200 U.S. residents over the age of 18 about their daily cleaning habits, the ways they protect themselves from disease while traveling, and mobile device cleaning routines. What we found is a big disconnect between people's daily behaviors and the need to guard against the spread of bacteria.


Only clean a surface in their home if it looks dirty.


Would prefer to eat a sandwich on public transit than in their bathroom. than

## 88\%

Are on their phone while using the bathroom.

Throughout this report, we'll answer:
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## Who's the Dirtiest?

The truth is everyone prioritizes different cleaning habits and overlooks others that can breed and spread infectious bacteria.

## Boomers Are a Travel Risk

Come cold and flu season, Boomers are the most likely to "share the love" (i.e. bacteria). In fact, three in four Boomers (77\%) don't wipe down any areas they touch on public transportation when sick. Baby Boomers are also twice as likely (39\%) as Millennials (23\%) to not wash their hands after traveling on public transportation. As a population more vulnerable to bacteria, Boomers are risking their long-term health and wellness by not taking travel hygiene seriously.

## Parents Have the Dirtiest Devices

Parents often seek solace in their bathroom and use the alone time to catch up on work emails, text messages, phones calls or social media by bringing their phone with them. In fact, those with kids are even more likely to use their phones in the bathroom (93\%) than those who are childless (83\%). However, tests of mobile devices show that our phones can harbor "bathroom" bacteria such as E. coli. The half of parents (45\%) that also hold their phone in their mouth because their hands are too full are providing bacteria with direct access to the body.

## Men Have Dirtier Homes

Keeping to stereotypes, men tend to have a more relaxed approach to cleaning their living spaces and could be missing "hidden" bacteria. Almost three in five (56\%) only clean a surface in their home when it looks dirty, compared to less than half (49\%) of women. Men are also less likely than women to clean areas that are frequently touched, but not as noticeably dirty. This includes the one in four (23\%) who have never cleaned their light switches, compared to one in seven (16\%) women.

# What gaps exists in today's cleaning practices? 

## Good, But Not Great

## 58\%

Three in five clean their bed sheets more than their shower

## Today's Cleaning Practices Aren't Enough

In the age of the superbug, we are still not making household cleanliness a priority. While the majority of people clean their kitchen (87\%) and bathroom (80\%) once a week, while roughly one in five clean their bedrooms (18\%) or home office (21\%) just once a month.

Outside of frequency, other cleaning misconceptions create unhealthy homes. Half of Americans (52\%) admit they only clean a surface if it has dust or food residue, increasing the chances that bacteria could exist in a seemingly "clean" home. People's predisposition to just wipe-down surfaces, rather than really clean, also causes them to miss high-touch items in their homes where bacteria can thrive longer than those in the air or on clothing. For the one in five people who have never cleaned their light switches (19\%) or TV remote (20\%), this means they are unknowingly harboring bacteria that could make them sick.

## People Don't Trust Guests' Cleaning Habits

People may not put enough effort into their household cleaning, but they are sure nervous about the bacteria others could bring into their home. When it comes to hosting friends and family, two in five (39\%) are most concerned that guests won't do something as simple as wash their hands after using the restroom. In fact, twice as many people (39\%) were concerned that their guests wouldn't wash their hands than were concerned they would leave their shoes on in the house (20\%).

While shoes can create traceable dirt, poor hand-washing leaves homes infected with bacteria that can easily go undetected. Concerns with how guests are spreading bacteria leads two in three (67\%) to clean their home both before and after friends or family visit.

## FINDINGS BY DEMOGRAPHIC

## How often do you clean the following spaces in your home?



## People Aren't Cleaning Enough

- Four in five (80\%) clean their bathroom once a week, three in four (76\%) clean their bedroom once a week and just three in five (61\%) clean their home office once a week.
- Women (84\%) were more likely than men (75\%) to clean their bathroom once a week, while one in five men (20\%) admit to cleaning their bathroom just once a month.


## Boomers Prioritize the Kitchen and Bathroom

- Almost all Boomers clean their kitchen (94\%) and bathroom (89\%) at least once a week.
- Only four in five Millennials clean their kitchen once a week (82\%) and just three in four (74\%) clean their bathroom once a week.


## PARENTAL FINDINGS

## How often do you clean the following spaces in your home?



Kids


No Kids

## Parents Clean More

- More than four in five (85\%) parents clean their bathroom once a week and almost all (90\%) clean their kitchen once a week.
- Just three in four (75\%) without kids clean their bathroom once a week, while four in five ( $84 \%$ ) clean their kitchen once a week.
- Two in three parents (65\%) even clean their home office once a week, compared to less than three in five non-parents (58\%).


## FINDINGS BY DEMOGRAPHIC

## Which do you clean more often: your bed sheets or your shower?



## People Prioritize Sheets Over Showers

- Almost three in five (58\%) clean their sheets more than their shower.
- Women are more likely (38\%) to clean their shower versus men (33\%).


## Millennials Clean Their Shower Less

- Almost two in three (62\%) clean their bed sheets more often than their shower, less than three in five Boomers (57\%) note the same.


## PARENTAL FINDINGS

## Which do you clean more often: your bed sheets or your shower?



## Homes With Children Have Cleaner Showers

- Two in five parents (39\%) clean their shower more than their bed sheets, while just one in three (34\%) non-parents note the same.


## FINDINGS BY DEMOGRAPHIC

## Do you typically only clean a surface in your home when it looks dirty (e.g. dusty, has food residue)?



## People Have Dirty Counters

- Half (52\%) admit they only clean a surface in their home if it looks dirty.
- Men are more likely to do this (56\%) than women (49\%).


## Millennials Aren't Cleaning Surfaces Enough

- Three in five (59\%) only clean a surface if it has dirt or residue on it, while just two in five (44\%) Boomers admit the same.


## PARENTAL FINDINGS

## Do you typically only clean a surface in your home when it looks dirty (e.g. dusty, has food residue)?



## Parents Keep Cleaner Counters

- Almost half (47\%) clean their counters even when they don't look dirty, while only two in five (41\%) non-parents could say the same.


## FINDINGS BY DEMOGRAPHIC

## After which of the following activities do you wipe down your counter?



## People Miss Their Biggest Surface Risks

- The majority clean their counter when cutting or preparing meat (92\%), but just one in three (37\%) do the same after placing mail down and only half (50\%) do so after placing shopping bags on the counter.
- Men are less likely to clean the counter after cutting or preparing meat (87\%) than women (95\%) and also less likely to clean after animals or children have been on a counter (73\%) versus women (80\%).


## Boomers Overlook Mail, Shopping Bags

- Less than one in three (30\%) will wipe a counter after putting mail on it, compared to two in five Millennials (41\%).
- Less than half of Boomers (46\%) will clean the counter after shopping bags, compared to over half of Millennials (52\%).


## PARENTAL FINDINGS

## After which of the following activities do you wipe down your counter?



## Parents Are Less Observant of Children and Pets

- Four in five non-parents (81\%) will clean a counter after children or animals, compared to just three in four (75\%) parents.
- Those who don't have children are equally as likely (37\%) as those with (37\%) to clean after putting mail on the counter.


## When was the last time you sanitized the following items in your home?



## Light Switches, TV Remotes Are The Most Neglected Surfaces

- Almost one in three (30\%) have only sanitized their light switches in the last six months and one in five (19\%) have never cleaned them.
- Similarly, one in four (29\%) have only cleaned their TV remote in the last six months and one in five (20\%) have never sanitized it.
- One in five men (23\%) have never cleaned their light switches, compared to one in six women (16\%).


## Millennials Clean Switches, Handles and Remotes More

- Two in five Millennials have cleaned their light switches (37\%), door handles (40\%) and TV remotes (40\%) in the past week.
- Roughly one in three Boomers have cleaned their light switches (31\%), door handles (36\%) and TV remotes (34\%) in the past week.


## PARENTAL FINDINGS

## When was the last time you sanitized the following items in your home?




Kids
No Kids

## Childless People Skip Certain Surfaces

- Just one in four (25\%) have cleaned their light switches in the past six months, while one in three parents (35\%) have done the same.
- Just one in four (26\%) non-parents have cleaned their TV remotes in the past six months compared to one in three parents (32\%).


## When hosting friends or family, are you more likely to clean before they arrive or after they depart?



## People Double-Up When Cleaning for Company

- The majority (67\%) will choose to clean before and after company comes.
- For those that only clean once, one in seven (15\%) will just clean before company arrives and one in 10 (10\%) just after they depart.
- Women are more likely (73\%) than men (58\%) to clean before and after company visits.


## Boomers Are Most Diligent With Cleaning Before and After

- Almost three in four Baby Boomers (71\%) will clean before and after guests visit, only three in five Millennials (62\%) do the same.


## PARENTAL FINDINGS

## When hosting friends or family, are you more likely to clean before they arrive or after they depart?



## Parents Make Time Before and After Guests

- Almost three in four (71\%) will clean before and after a guest visits, while just three in five (63\%) non-parents do the same.


## What is your top cleanliness concern when hosting guests?



## People Don't Trust Guests To Be Clean

- Two in five (39\%) are most concerned that friends and family won't wash their hands after using the bathroom.
- One in five (20\%) claim guests not taking their shoes off is their biggest concern.
- Women are more concerned (43\%) than men (33\%) that guests won't wash their hands.


## Boomers Are Especially Concerned About Hand Washing

- More than two in five Boomers (44\%) are most concerned with guests washing their hands, one in three (34\%) Millennials agree.
- Millennials are twice as likely (24\%) as Boomers (11\%) to be concerned guests won't take off their shoes.


## PARENTAL FINDINGS

## What is your top cleanliness concern when hosting guests?



## Handwashing and Shoes Are Top Concerns For Parents

- Two in five (41\%) are concerned guests won't wash their hands after using the bathroom and one in five (21\%) are concerned they won't take their shoes off.
- Of those without kids, one in three (37\%) are concerned about hand washing and less than one in five (18\%) are concerned about shoes in the house.


## How do people spread disease while traveling?

# Planes, Trains and Disease 

## 50\%

Half would prefer to eat a sandwich on public transit than in their bathroom.

## Public Transit is Dirtier Than Your Bathroom

Public transportation, be it a commercial airplane or subway, is a hotbed for bacteria, especially since two in five (39\%) still choose to travel when they are sick. These people are not just spreading disease to the travelers right next to them, they are leaving it behind as well. In fact, three in five (60\%) don't wipe down areas they've touched when traveling while sick. With strains of strep and pneumonia now becoming antibiotic resistant, catching an illness from the subway pole could cause children and older adults to fight for their life.

Traveling has been blamed for the spread of infectious diseases to different towns, states and countries. The volume of people who enter and exit a subway, train or airplane in a given day makes these high-risk environments where more bacteria is found per square inch than would be on their toilet seat at home. The one in four (27\%) who then don't wash their hands or use hand sanitizer after traveling on public transportation create an even greater risk not just for themselves, but for everyone they come into contact with.

## People Opt for Discomfort to Avoid "Germy-Areas"

People may not see the bacteria risks on their seats, but they know they exist in bathrooms on public transit. Whether on the rails or in the air, the majority (68\%) would rather sit with a full bladder than risk using the available bathroom. Having to make more contact in the restroom, women are even more likely to restrain themselves (74\%) than men (61\%).

So just how long are they willing to "hold it"? Almost half (45\%) are willing to wait up to two hours and another one in three (33\%) are willing to avoid using the bathroom for up to five hours.

## Do you typically wash your hands or use hand sanitizer immediately after traveling on public transportation?



## People Are Carrying More Than Luggage Home

- One in four (27\%) don't wash their hands after traveling on public transportation (e.g. subway, bus, train or airplane).
- One in three men (32\%) admit they don't clean or sanitize their hands after travel, making them less likely than women to do so (23\%).


## Boomers May Be the Dirtiest Travelers

- Two in five (39\%) do not wash or sanitize their hands after traveling.
- Just one in four Millennials (23\%) won't wash their hands after traveling on public transportation.


## PARENTAL FINDINGS

## Do you typically wash your hands or use hand sanitizer immediately after traveling on public transportation?



## Parents Are Just as Likely to Wash Their Hands

- An almost equal number of parents (67\%) and non-parents (63\%) will wash their hands after traveling on public transportation.


## FINDINGS BY DEMOGRAPHIC

## Do you use public transportation when you have a cold or are sick?



## Illness Doesn't Stop People From Traveling

- Two in five (39\%) continue to use public transportation (e.g. subway, bus, train or airplane) when they are sick.
- Women are less likely (38\%) than men (42\%) to travel on public transportation when they are sick.


## Millennials Travel More When Under the Weather

- More than two in five (43\%) continue to ride public transportation when ill.
- Just over one in four (27\%) Baby Boomers will use public transportation if they are feeling the same way.


## PARENTAL FINDINGS

## Do you use public transportation when you have a cold or are sick?



## Those With or Without Kids Use Transit When Sick

- Two in five parents (40\%) and almost two in five non-parents (38\%) use public transportation when they don't feel well.


## If sick, do you wipe down any areas of your seat that you touched before exiting public transportation?



## People Freely Share Bacteria on Transit

- When sick, just one in three (37\%) will wipe down areas they've touched before they depart.
- Men are more likely (39\%) than women (35\%) to wipe down their seat before they leave.


## Millennials are Twice as Likely to Clean Their Seats

- More than two in five (43\%) wipe down any areas they may have touched on public transit, compared to just one in five (21\%) Baby Boomers.


## PARENTAL FINDINGS

## If sick, do you wipe down any areas of your seat that you touched before exiting public transportation?



## Parental Duties Don't Inhibit Good Travel Habits

- Those with children (36\%) are almost just as likely as those without (37\%) to wipe down their area before leaving public transportation.


## FINDINGS BY DEMOGRAPHIC

## Which location would you prefer to have to eat a sandwich: on a public subway/bus or in your bathroom?



## People Think Public Transit is Cleaner

- Half (50\%) would prefer to eat a sandwich on public transit versus in their bathroom (31\%).
- Women are less likely (48\%) than men (52\%) to choose public transit.


## Boomers Are Least Trusting of Public Transit

- Just two in five Boomers (39\%) would prefer to eat a sandwich on public transit, compared to over half (55\%) of Millennials.


## PARENTAL FINDINGS

## Which location would you prefer to have to eat a sandwich: on a public subway/bus or in your bathroom?



## Parents and Non-Parent Believe Public Transit is Cleaner

- Half of those with (50\%) and without (50\%) kids would prefer to eat a sandwich on public transit.


## Do you typically avoid using bathrooms on commercial buses, trains or airplanes?



## People Stay Clear of Bathrooms on Public Transportation

- Two in three (68\%) avoid using bathrooms on commercial buses, trains or airplanes.
- Three in four women (74\%) will avoid the bathroom while traveling, but just three in five men (61\%) do the same.


## Millennials and Boomers Won't Risk Restroom Cleanliness

- Millennials (70\%) and Baby Boomers (69\%) are just as likely to avoid a bathroom on public transportation.


## PARENTAL FINDINGS

## Do you typically avoid using bathrooms on commercial buses, trains or airplanes?



## Parents Are Not More Cautious of Onboard Bathrooms

- Almost an equal amount of parents (70\%) and non-parents (67\%) avoid bathrooms on commercial buses, trains or airplanes.


## How long have you "held" your need to use the bathroom while traveling on a commercial bus, train or airplane?



## People Will "Hold It" For Up to Five Hours

- One in three (33\%) have refused to relieve themselves for three to five hours to avoid a bathroom on a commercial bus, train or airplane.
- One in 10 (11\%) have even held their need to use the bathroom for more than five hours.
- Men are slightly more likely (34\%) than women (32\%) to "hold it" for three to five hours.


## Millennials Can Hold It All Day

- Almost two in five (38\%) will hold their need to use the bathroom for three to five hours. One in seven (14\%) will wait more than five hours.
- Just one in four Boomers (28\%) will refrain from using the bathroom for three to five hours.


## PARENTAL FINDINGS

## How long have you "held" your need to use the bathroom while traveling on a commercial bus, train or airplane?



## Parents Are Willing To ‘Hold It" As Long As Non-Parents Do

- Almost half of those with (44\%) and without kids (46\%) will avoid using the bathroom for up to two hours.
- Parents are just as likely (33\%) as non-parents (33\%) to hold their need to use the bathroom for three to five hours as well.

Are devices increasing the spread of disease?

## Devices + Health Risks

## 46\% <br> Almost half bring their phone into public restrooms every time they go

## Our Phones Are Making Us Sick

As the most high-touch device in people's daily lives, mobile phones pose the biggest risk for spreading disease. With the majority of people admitting to using their phone in the bathroom ( $88 \%$ ), while cooking ( $89 \%$ ) and while using public transit ( $80 \%$ ), these devices are regularly exposed to everything from strep, to E. Coli, to strains of staph found in fecal matter!

Our phones become dangerous when they aren't regularly cleaned or sanitized, allowing bacteria to continue to breed and spread. With one in four (23\%) having never cleaned their phones, mobile devices could host more bacteria than someone's household bathroom (which four in five (80\%) clean once a week). To make matters worse, when their hands are full, two in five people (41\%) won't hesitate to put their phone in their mouths, putting bacteria directly into their system.

## Even Our Lunch Break Poses a Health Risk

Outside of holding our phones in our mouth, casual eating habits such as a "working lunch" could also mean we are consuming bacteria. Half of Americans (48\%) eat lunch at their desk, but one in three (33\%) clean their desk just once a week. Added to this, one in five people (20\%) don't wash their hands before eating at the office. By eating in spaces where cleanliness is not a priority, people are unknowingly adding bacteria they caught from the subway, mail or a coworker into their food.

## Have you ever used your phone while doing the following?



## We Use Our Phones During the Dirtiest Deeds

- The majority use their phone while using the bathroom (88\%), riding public transportation (89\%) and cleaning their house (85\%).
- Women (90\%) are more likely than men (85\%) to use their phone in the bathroom.


## Even Boomers' Phones Collect a Lot of Bacteria

- While almost all Millennials (94\%) use their phone in the bathroom, three in four (74\%) Baby Boomers do the same.
- Four in five Baby Boomers (78\%) also use their phone while cooking, compared to nine in 10 Millennials (92\%) who do the same.


## PARENTAL FINDINGS

## Have you ever used your phone while doing the following?



## Parents Have Poor Device Practices

- While just four in five non-parents (83\%) use their phone in the bathroom, almost all parents (93\%) admit to the same behavior.
- Parents are also more likely to use their phone while cooking (93\%) versus non-parents (85\%).


## How often do you bring your phone into a public restroom (including at work or school)?



## Phones are a Go-To Bathroom Accessory

- Almost half (46\%) bring their phone into a public restroom every time they go.
- Men are almost as likely (45\%) as women (46\%) to bring their phone into a public restroom.


## Millennials and Boomers Regularly Have Their Phones in a Stall

- Over half of Millennials (52\%) bring their phone into a public restroom every time they go, one in three Boomers (32\%) do the same.


## PARENTAL FINDINGS

## How often do you bring your phone into a public restroom (including at work or school)?



## Those Without Kids Bring Their Phones Less

- Just two in five (43\%) of those without children bring their phone in a public restroom every time they go, while half of parents (49\%) admit the same.


## Have you ever wiped down or cleaned your phone?



## Not Everyone Cleans Their Phone

- One in four (23\%) have never wiped down or cleaned their phone.
- More than one in four men (26\%) admit to never cleaning their phone, compared to one in five (20\%) women.


## Millennials Have Better Cleaning Habits Than Boomers

- One in three (32\%) Baby Boomers have never cleaned or wiped down their phone, compared to one in five (21\%) Millennials.


## PARENTAL FINDINGS

## Have you ever wiped down or cleaned your phone?



## Parents Take Cleaning Seriously

- Four in five (80\%) have wiped down or cleaned their phone.
- Less than three in four non-parents (71\%) can say the same.


## Have you ever held any of the following in your mouth because your hands were full?



## People Are Giving Bacteria and Others Direct Access

- Two in five (41\%) have put their phones in their mouth when their hands were full.
- Phones aren't even the most likely object, over half have held keys (51\%) or a credit card (54\%) in their mouth.
- One in three (34\%) have even held cash in their mouth.
- Men (41\%) are just as likely as women (41\%) to have held a phone in their mouth, but women are more likely to have held a credit card (62\%) versus men (44\%)


## Millennials are More Daring Than Boomers

- Over half of Millennials (55\%) have held their phone in their mouth and almost two in three (63\%) have put a credit card in their mouth
- Boomers are twice as likely to put keys (41\%) or a credit card (39\%) in their mouth than a phone (21\%).


## PARENTAL FINDINGS

## Have you ever held any of the following in your mouth because your hands were full?



## Those Without Kids Are More Cautious

- Just over one in three (37\%) have put a phone in their mouth because their hands were full, compared to almost half (45\%) of parents.
- Parents were also more likely to have held a credit card (60\%) in their mouth than non-parents (48\%).


## FINDINGS BY DEMOGRAPHIC

## During the workday, do you typically eat at your desk (in a home or commercial office)?



## People Use Their Desks as a Dining Spot

- Almost half ( $48 \%$ ) regularly eat their lunch at their desk during the work week.
- Men (49\%) were slightly more likely than women (47\%) to eat lunch at their desk.


## Millennials Take More Working Lunches

- Half of Millennials (53\%) will eat at their desk during the workday, only one in three Baby Boomers (32\%) note the same.


## PARENTAL FINDINGS

## During the workday, do you typically eat at your desk (in a home or commercial office)?



## Parents Are More Likely to Eat at Their Desks

- Over half of parents (53\%) regularly eat at their desk during the work week.
- In comparison, just two in five of those with no kids (42\%) admit to using their desk as a dining space.


## How often do you clean or sanitize your desk with a cleaning agent?



## People Aren't Cleaning Their Desks Enough

- Two in five (41\%) clean their desk once a day, but one in three (33\%) clean their desk just once a week.
- Men are also twice as likely (10\%) to have never cleaned their desk than women (5\%).


## Boomers Have the Dirtiest Workspaces

- While half of Millennials (47\%) clean their desk once a day, just one in four (24\%) Baby Boomers do the same.
- One in five Baby Boomers (20\%) even admit to never having cleaned or sanitized their desk - making them four times as likely as Millennials (4\%) to have a dirty workspace.


## PARENTAL FINDINGS

## How often do you clean or sanitize your desk with a cleaning agent?



Non-Parents and Parents Agree on Workplace Tidiness

- Two in five non-parents (41\%) and parents (42\%) clean their desk once a day.
- An equal number of parents (33\%) and non-parents (32\%) also clean their desk once a week.


## Do you typically wash your hands before eating in the following locations?



## People Only Wash-Up at Home

- Four in five (81\%) wash their hands before eating at home, but less than three in four (71\%) wash their hands before eating at a food court or fast food restaurant.
- Men are more likely to wash their hands before eating at home (84\%) than women (78\%).


## Boomers Are Less Conscious of Hand Washing

- One in three (33\%) will not wash their hands at a food court, and one in four (25\%) won't wash their hands at a friend's house.
- Just one in four Millennials (27\%) won't wash their hands before eating in a food court and one in seven (16\%) won't clean-up before eating at a friend's home.


## PARENTAL FINDINGS

## Do you typically wash your hands before eating in the following locations?



## Parents and Non-Parents Ignore Hand Washing

- Less than three in four who have kids (72\%) and who don't (70\%) will wash their hands before eating in a food court.
- Four in five parents (81\%) and non-parents (80\%) wash their hands at home.


## THANK YOU

For more information about this survey and Vital Vio, please visit www.vitalvio.com.

To receive more insight or executive commentary on the survey findings, please contact Vital Vio at VitalVio@SHIFTcomm.com.


