



Shoes On or Off?

Traveling executives are familiar with the cultural imperative in some cultures to take shoes off prior to entering a home. But here in America, most families don't consider removing shoes until it's time for bed. But we should. We already know germs are everywhere. We're told to wash our hands and wipe surfaces – but foot traffic is rarely a consideration. Yet shoes and paws are one of the key carriers of germs.

Not only do studies show that bacteria live longer on shoes than in other places, what's nastier is the average day's journey means a constant pick up of new residue on the feet, feeding the growth of even more bacteria. These menacing germs have the potential to cause infections in your stomach, eyes and lungs. And transferring these germs to your home's floors is speedy, upwards of 90 percent on tile floors and even higher for carpet.

One important study by a microbiologist and professor at the University of Arizona, Dr. Charles Gerba, showed that after just two weeks more than 420,000 units of bacteria were found on the outside of new test shoes from Rockport. Of the bacteria identified, 27 percent were the deadly E. Coli virus. Also found was Klebsiella pneumonia, which can cause pneumonia and infections in the bloodstream and wounds, and Serratia ficaria, which could lead to infection of the respiratory tract.

Most people think toilet seats are the surface with the most germs, yet they generally have 1,000 bacteria or less. "The common occurrence (96 percent) of coliform and E. coli bacteria on the outside of the shoes indicates frequent contact with fecal material, which most likely originates from floors in public restrooms or contact with animal fecal material outdoors," said Gerba. "Our study also indicated that bacteria can be tracked by shoes over a long distance into your home or personal space after the shoes were contaminated with bacteria".

How do you minimize or eliminate this problematic source of germs? Becoming a "no shoes" house by relegating shoes to the door is a good start. Washing shoes or wiping the soles with disinfectant can eliminate upwards of 90 percent of germs, and while dog and cat paws are relatively small – they are also exposed to bird and animal droppings as well as fertilizers – so a quick wipe of your pet's paws after a walk should be standard practice. Frequent vacuuming and mopping will also help, but don't forget to wipe the bottom of your vacuum, too.



Because asking guests to remove shoes can be awkward here in the States for a variety of reasons, a stash of house slippers or socks on hand is one solution. If your guest isn't comfortable, or you are hosting a larger gathering – plan to spend as much time cleaning the floor as you do washing dishes.

If you are concerned about problematic illness, meet with your doctor at Executive MD to discuss options for minimizing bacteria in your home.

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