



Combating Bacteria in Office Kitchens

Office Coffee Cups: More Than Just Caffeine?

Is your coffee cup making you sick? It could be, if improper cleaning techniques are allowing dangerous bacteria to grow there. Office kitchens can harbor germs that aren't necessarily found at home because of the sheer volume of people typically using office kitchens. Bacteria can flourish because of the constant presence of moisture and food particles on countertops, sponges, sinks, and even in coffee cups.

Because of these conditions, cleaning techniques at the office need to be somewhat different than techniques used at home in order to effectively kill bacteria.

Bacteria and Their Dangers

Bacteria such as *E. coli* and other coliforms can be found in office kitchens. These bacteria attack the intestinal tract. Some symptoms include diarrhea, abdominal pain or cramping, nausea, vomiting, and occasionally a fever. While an otherwise healthy person typically recovers within one to three days, the young, old, and immune-compromised are at greater risk when exposed to these bacteria.

Proper Cleaning Techniques

What can you do to ensure a safe cup of coffee every morning? Proper cleaning techniques are your best bet.

If a dishwasher isn't available, wash cups in hot, soapy water, then rinse. Sterilize the cups by dipping them into a solution of bleach and water (one capful of bleach per gallon of water) and invert the cup on a clean surface to air dry. The bleach should not be rinsed off. It will evaporate completely without leaving a residue.

At the end of the day, soak the cleaning sponge in the bleach solution, and throw the dishcloth into the washing machine. Since bacteria grow very readily on these materials, they must be cleaned every day to prevent cross-contamination of cups and utensils.

If antibacterial dishwashing detergent is used without the bleach rinse, cups and other utensils must soak in the soapy water for several minutes for any bacteria to be killed. Keep in mind that despite its name, *antibacterial dishwashing detergent is not as effective in killing bacteria as a mild bleach rinse.*



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