

Disasters and Food Safety

Clean and Sanitize the Kitchen



Cleaning and sanitizing the kitchen are essential steps in preventing foodborne illness. It is important to remember that not every appliance should be cleaned in the same way.

Always follow the manufacturer's instructions for cleaning and sanitizing equipment; however, below are general guidelines for cleaning and sanitizing various food contact surfaces and equipment.

Wash

Wash dishes, utensils, and other surfaces that touch food, such as refrigerator drawers, with hot, soapy water. Rinse with clean, drinkable water.

Sanitize

Mix 1 cup of regular, unscented household bleach with 5 gallons of water, or use 1 tablespoon of regular, unscented household bleach for every 1 gallon of water.

Wear rubber gloves to avoid skin irritation. Water should not be hot as this can weaken the bleach.

To sanitize pans, dishes, glassware, and utensils, submerge items in a bleach solution for 15 minutes or in boiling water.

For sanitizing metal utensils, silverware, and pots and pans, submerge items in boiling water for 10 minutes. Using a bleach solution may cause the metal to darken.

Using a cloth, wipe the countertops and outer surfaces of kitchen appliances with a bleach mixture and let them air dry.

Food Storage Containers

Do not put storage containers in the dishwasher unless the product is marked dishwasher safe. If no instructions for cleaning are listed, wash in warm, soapy water, paying attention to crevasses and indentations where food can get stuck. Rinse thoroughly and air dry completely before storing.

Cloths and Potholders

Laundry dishcloths and potholders on the hot cycle in the washer and dryer to destroy harmful bacteria.

Inspect Cookware

Discard bowls, cups, cutting boards, or utensils made of soft, porous material, such as wood or plastic, that have come in contact with flood water. These items absorb water and may be unsafe to use.

Removing Mold

Hard plastic, glass, and metal that have mold can be cleaned with warm water and soap. To remove mold from kitchen cabinets or hard, non-porous surfaces, scrub with detergent and water, then dry thoroughly.

Sanitize hard surfaces such as countertops, flatware, stoves, sinks, plates, and tools with 1 cup of regular, unscented household bleach per 1 gallon of water. If surfaces are rough, scrub with a stiff brush, rinse surfaces with clean water, and air dry.

Oven

Before cleaning an oven, make sure it is cool and no pots or pans are inside. Follow manufacturer instructions.

Oven cleaners made for a cold oven are more potent than those made for a hot oven. Pay close attention to the recommendations on cleaners. Additionally, do not use oven cleaners on self-cleaning ovens, as this may damage the oven's surface.

Another method for cleaning an oven is placing ½ cup of household ammonia in a bowl and then put it in a cool, closed oven overnight or for at least 4 hours.

After 4 hours, remove and wash racks in warm, soapy water to remove burned-on food. Wash the oven walls and doors with a mixture of ½ cup ammonia and 1-quart warm water. Wipe down the oven walls and doors.

Finally, wash the oven walls and doors with warm, soapy water, then rinse and wipe dry.



Microwave

Follow manufacturer instructions. Do not use oven cleaner, steel wool, or abrasive cleaners in a microwave.

To remove caked-on food, heat one of these options in the microwave in a microwave-safe dish until the mixture boils:

- 6 tablespoons baking soda with 1 cup water
- ½ cup lemon juice with 1 cup water

Leave the mixture in the microwave with the door closed until it cools. Remove the mixture and wipe the microwave with a cloth or paper towel.

Kitchen Sink and Disposal

Wash and disinfect the kitchen sink once or twice a week with either a disinfectant cleaner or a mixture of 1 tablespoon of regular, unscented household bleach per 1 gallon of water. Sanitize drains and disposals monthly by pouring 1 tablespoon of bleach in 1 quart of water down the drain. Wash sink strainers weekly.

Coffeemakers

Follow manufacturer instructions.

General recommendations:

- Decalcify the machine by adding 4 cups of vinegar to the reservoir, letting it stand for 30 minutes, and then running it through the unit.
- Follow up by running two to three cycles of fresh water. Clean every 40 to 80 cycles or once a month.

Sponges

Kitchen sponges can contain harmful bacteria and carry viruses; however, there are safe, effective ways to clean:

- Bleach soak: Use ¾ cup of regular, unscented household bleach for every 1 gallon of water, and soak sponges for 5 minutes. Rinse thoroughly. Let air dry before using.
- Dishwasher: Ideally, the dishwasher should reach 155 F and include a heated dry cycle.
- Microwave: Wet the sponge and microwave it for 2 minutes. Heating a dry sponge can cause a fire, so make sure the sponge is completely wet. Let air dry before using.
- Do not microwave metallic padded kitchen sponges. If planning to reuse them, run them through the dishwasher.

Cleaning a Refrigerator or Freezer

Wash shelves, drawers, and other removable parts by hand with hot, soapy water. When cleaning the refrigerator or freezer, store perishable food temporarily in a cooler to prevent harmful bacteria from growing. Discard spoiled or questionable food.

- Shelves, drawers, and other removable parts: Using a cloth, sanitize with 1 tablespoon of regular, unscented household bleach mixed with 1 gallon of water. Let air dry.
- Doors and interior: Mix 2 teaspoons of baking soda with 1 quart of water. Wash doors and interior of refrigerator and freezer. Rinse with a bleach solution.
- Leave the door open for 15 minutes to allow air drying before refilling the refrigerator.

Refrigerator Odors

Try one of these options to get rid of lingering odors:

- Wipe down the appliance with a 1:1 ratio of vinegar and water to destroy mildew.
- Stuff appliances with old rolled newspapers and leave them closed for several days before cleaning them with vinegar and water.
- Place a large, shallow container of fresh coffee grounds or baking soda on the bottom of the appliance.
- Soak a cotton swab in vanilla and place it inside the refrigerator or freezer with the door closed for 24 hours.

Dishwasher Odors

Follow specific manufacturer instructions. Below are suggestions from the Whirlpool® and Kenmore® appliance companies for removing odors from a dishwasher using vinegar and baking soda:

- Clean the filter at the bottom of the dishwasher for food, debris, glass, or other obstructions.
- Pour 2 cups of white vinegar into a glass measuring cup and place it upright on the dishwasher's lower rack. Do not add detergent. Run a normal cycle with heated dry-off.
- After the cycle is complete, sprinkle 1 cup baking soda in the dishwasher and run again on a hot water cycle.

Additional Option: If available, use the home dishwasher sanitizing cycle to clean non-porous materials such as acrylic or glass.

Call Your Local Office

Contact your local Illinois Extension office with your food safety questions: go.illinois.edu/FindILExtension.

References

- [Kitchen Appliances](#), American Cleaning Institute.
- [Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene](#), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
- [Flood](#), North Dakota State University.
- [Dishwashing sponges and brushes: Consumer practices and bacterial growth and survival](#), International Journal of Food Microbiology, 337.
- [Clean the Germiest Home Items](#), National Sanitation Foundation.
- [Cleaning Your Electric Stove Clean & Healthy Housing](#), Mississippi State University Extension Service.
- [Disinfecting Dishes, Cookware and Utensils Safety Guidelines After A Disaster](#), University of Wisconsin Extension.
- [Food Safety and Inspection Service](#), United States Department of Agriculture.
- [Mold Cleanup in Your Home](#), United States Environmental Protection Agency.

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Illinois Extension
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

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