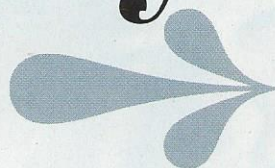


HOW healthy is your home?

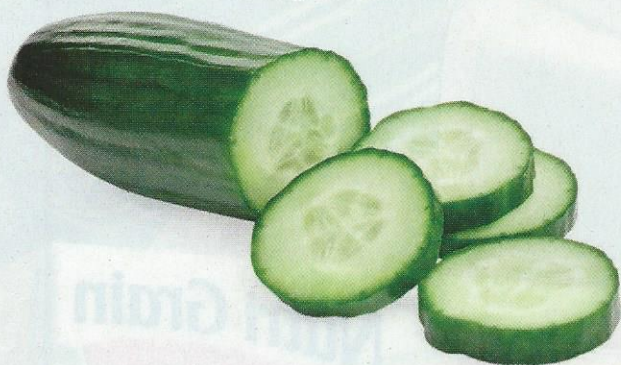


A clean house is a lot like a fortress protecting your family from colds, flus, allergies, pests and more. Take our quiz (answers on page 104) to learn whether yours is a safe haven or a roost in need of a wellness boost. **BY GINA ROBERTS-GREY**

1

TRUE OR FALSE?

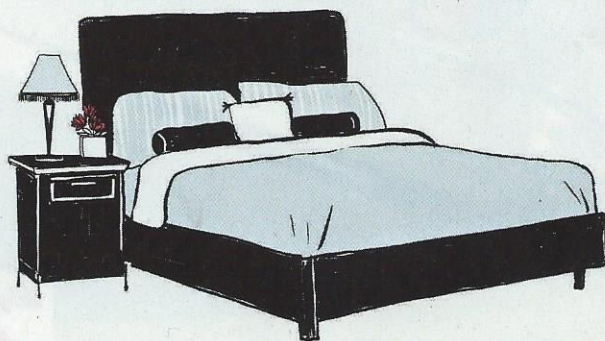
Cross-contamination with salmonella, E. coli and other bacteria isn't only a worry when handling meat. It can occur when preparing fruits or vegetables too.



(2)

You just put fresh sheets on the bed. How soon should you replace them with new ones?

- A) After 1 month B) After 1 week C) If someone gets sick D) If you have overnight guests**



3/

What poses the biggest risk for staph or MRSA?



A) A cutting board



B) A toothbrush holder



C) A pet toy

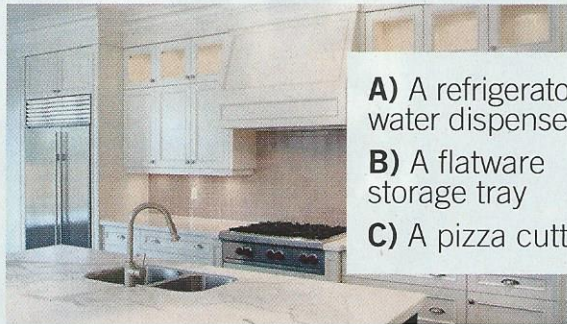
4

TRUE OR FALSE?

It's okay to save a few bucks by skipping flea and tick prevention for the family pet during winter months.



5 / Which of these is one of the germiest items in the kitchen?

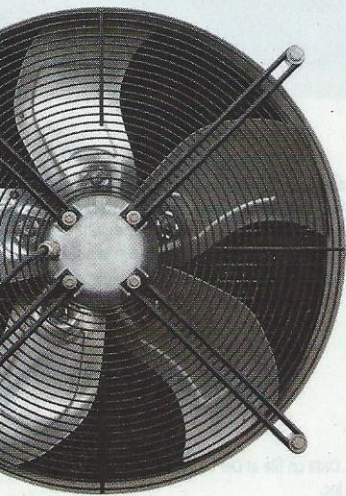


- A) A refrigerator water dispenser
- B) A flatware storage tray
- C) A pizza cutter

(6)

How much dust can collect in your home's HVAC ducts in a year?

- A) One cup
- B) One pound
- C) 10 pounds
- D) 40 pounds
- E) None, because of air flow when the system is on



(7)

Most air purifiers can purge which of these pollutants from your home?



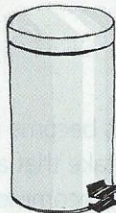
- A) Secondhand and/or thirdhand smoke



- B) Pet dander



- C) Pollen



- D) Offensive odors wafting from the garbage can, litter box and more

- E) All of the above

8 /

How often should you clean your kitchen sponge?

- A) Once a week
- B) Once a day
- C) Once a month
- D) When it smells funky



9



What's the best tool for cleaning ceiling fan blades?

- A) A dust rag or cloth
- B) A fan-blade cleaning tool (which slips over the blade)
- C) Damp paper towels or cleaning rags
- D) A pillowcase



(10)

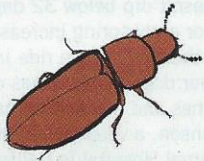
Second- and thirdhand smoke can get into your home via...

- A) Bathroom and kitchen vents
- B) Your clothing
- C) Your pet
- D) All of the above

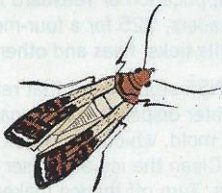
11/

Can you name these pantry pests?

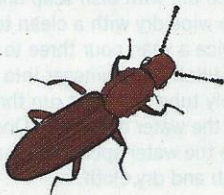
A)



B)

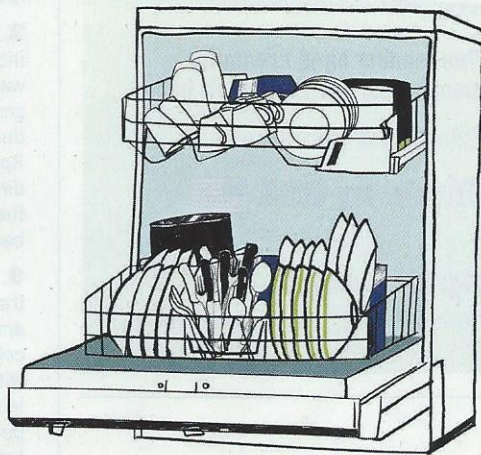


C)



12/ The best time to run the dishwasher is...

- A) Overnight, so you'll wake up to clean dishes
- B) First thing in the morning, so you'll come home to clean dishes
- C) When you have time to empty it soon after it shuts off



13

There's a musty smell in your laundry room—but there are no dirty clothes. What's the likely source?

- A) The hamper
- B) The washing machine
- C) The dryer lint trap



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answers

1. True The grocery store's misting system can contaminate produce with dirt and bacteria that grow in the spouts, says biotechnology scientist Stuart Reeves, Ph.D., director of research and development at Embria Health Sciences. One study found that only 17% of consumers wash cutting boards after slicing each vegetable, upping the odds of items becoming tainted and your family getting food poisoning. Wash your hands, cutting board and knives with a Lysol No-Touch Kitchen System (major retailers, starter kit \$10).

2. Anything but A "Bed linens—including blankets and quilts—should be washed once a week to reduce exposure to germs, grime and allergens, particularly during cold and flu season," says Kevin Ronneberg, M.D., associate medical director at Target. "Wash and dry linens at the hottest temperature setting, since most bacteria need extreme heat to be killed."

3. C A study by NSF International found that pet toys were a big source of staph and antibiotic-resistant staph, as well as coliform, yeast and mold. And playing with the dog's squeakers and ropes can leave your family at risk for illnesses. Hard pet toys should be cleaned monthly with hot soapy water, rinsed, disinfected with a mild bleach solution and then thoroughly rinsed again to remove any residue. "Soft toys can be sanitized with other laundry on the hot water cycle," says Lisa Yakas, manager of NSF International's Home Product Certification Program.

4. False While they love warm, humid weather, fleas and ticks can survive if the mercury doesn't dip below 32 degrees. A late winter or early spring increases the chances of their hitching a ride into your home on your dog or cat. "Fleas can cause itching, rashes and hives in humans," says Liz Hanson, a veterinarian at Corona del Mar Animal Hospital in California. A monthly application of VetGuard Plus (major retailers, \$25 for a four-month supply) kills ticks, fleas and other pests.

5. A An NSF study found that refrigerator ice and water dispensers were loaded with yeast and mold, which can wreak havoc on allergies. Clean the ice dispenser monthly, says Yakas. Turn off the ice maker and wash the ice bin with dish soap and warm water, then wipe dry with a clean towel. Once or twice a year, pour three to four cups of distilled white vinegar into the water supply tube and let it run through to sanitize the water dispenser. Once a week, wipe the water spout with a clean cotton swab and dry cloth.

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6. D (in a 1,500-square-foot home) "That dust is likely to contain dirt, allergens, bacteria, fungi, mold and approximately 40,000 dust mites per ounce," says Richard Lantz, an Air Systems Cleaning Specialist and a director at the National Air Duct Cleaners Association (NADCA). Every time you use your heating or cooling system, these allergens circulate in your home, which can lead to fatigue, sinus complications and asthma. A professional cleaning by a NADCA-certified company is recommended at least every two years.

7. D Gaseous pollutants like smoke are too small for most air purifiers to trap. While they may get rid of smells, they don't offer lung protection. Also, pet dander and pollen settle on floors and tables, where it's tough for a purifier to suck them up, explains James L. Sublett, M.D., vice president of the American College of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology. If unpleasant scents (like your son's sports gear) are the issue, try the Honeywell HHT-081 HEPAClean Tower Air Purifier with ionizer (major retailers, \$140). For a more powerful impact, step up to the Airoid Air Purifier (airoid.com, \$799), a filterless machine that uses NASA technology to eliminate bacteria, mold and more.

8. B If not properly disinfected, sponges can become a prime spot for germ growth and can easily spread salmonella and other sources of illness around the kitchen. "Clean your completely wet, nonmetallic kitchen sponge by placing it in the microwave on high for two minutes," says Yakas, who also suggests tossing sponges at least every two weeks. "Better options are dishcloths, towels and rags, which can be sanitized in the washing machine's hot water cycle with bleach."

9. D Ceiling fan blades are often overlooked as a place where dust mites can move in. Not only are fans home to mites, but they're also good at circulating them, and the allergens they produce, all around a room! "These pests bring wheezing, tight chests and coughing to allergy sufferers and asthmatics," says Reeves. "Put a pillowcase around the blade and pull it off, wiping all the dust into it. Empty the case outside, then launder it inside out on your washer's and dryer's hottest settings."

10. D They're often odorless, so you might not know they're clinging to your clothing after being near a smoker or sneaking in through doors, open windows or vents. Smoke can linger in dog and cat fur too, causing allergic and respiratory reactions in people and allergic skin inflammation in pets, according to Hanson. Seal foundation and wall cracks, plug unused electrical outlets, and install weather stripping around doors and windows to keep smoke and other allergens to a minimum. Rover, as well as his toys and bedding, should be washed monthly.

11. A) Flour beetle B) Indian meal moth C) Merchant grain beetle Missy Henriksen, vice president of public affairs for the National Pest Management Association, says these insects can live in *opened* packages of flour, cereal, cookies, seeds, nuts and dried vegetables, but they may also make their way into your home in *unopened* foods infested during the packaging process or while in the store, where the bugs can slip in through a box's seams. Protect your pantry by inspecting items for damage before tossing them into the cart and checking dry goods once a month. Henriksen also suggests adding a bay leaf to canisters and packages of dry goods. Its pungent smell may repel pantry pests.

12. C Mold can form when moisture lingers in the dishwasher after the heat cycle has run. "When the door is closed for several hours, it's the perfect environment for mold to grow," explains Robin Wilson, the president and CEO of Robin Wilson Home in New York City and an ambassador for the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America.

13. A or B Mold and staph can grow in the washer, particularly a front-loading one. Jim Rago, Ph.D., a microbiologist and an associate professor of biology at Lewis University in Romeoville, Illinois, recommends running the machine's self-clean cycle once a month and leaving the washer door open when not in use. "Or run a cup of bleach in an empty machine on the hottest setting," says Rago. Hampers that have been home to damp clothes can also develop mold or mildew. Wash your cloth hamper or wipe down a plastic one with a water/bleach mixture.

SCORING 0-4: Oops. It's time to revamp your routine. 5-9: Your home is on its way to a clean bill of health. 10-12: Nice job. Your abode is abundant with hygienic habits. 13: Congrats! Your shelter is a healthy sanctuary.

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