

Is your toothbrush covered in poop? Here's how to thoroughly clean it

Until you zap it, soak it or buy a new one, your toothbrush is covered in bacteria, viruses and other filth -- including poop particles.

Your toothbrush is gross. More than likely it's covered in bacteria, blood and saliva. And unless you're among the few civilized people who put the toilet seat down before they flush, it's also covered in poo. The reason? The sudden rush of water swirling around the toilet bowl stirs up a towering vortex of microscopic poo particles. This vapor then diffuses throughout your entire bathroom and eventually settles on every surface, including the bristles of your uncovered toothbrush.



This phenomena, known as "toilet plume," was first detailed in a landmark 1975 study in the *Journal of Applied Microbiology*. Further research has confirmed that toilet plume spreads infectious aerosols throughout your bathroom, including the potentially fatal bacterium *Clostridium difficile*, or C. diff.

This, of course, raises the question: How do you de-poop your toothbrush? Thankfully, it's pretty easy to do away with the fecal matter. (And by the way, if you want to become *extremely* civilized, here's how you can make your own bathroom bidet.)



3 ways to get the poo off

The American Dental Association admits there's little evidence to suggest bacteria on toothbrushes is likely to make you sick and the CDC concurs, although one recent study was able to detect the live SARS-CoV-2 virus in patients with COVID-19. ADA recommendations do, however, acknowledge the ick-factor and offer several ways to sanitize your toothbrush:

1. **Ultraviolet sanitizer devices:** If you're comfortable using light to zap bacteria on your toothbrush, UV sanitizers available on Amazon cost anywhere from \$11 for a portable device to \$47 for a wall-mounted multi-brush cleaner.
2. **Soak it in hydrogen peroxide:** For a less expensive solution, the ADA says a 3% solution of hydrogen peroxide has been shown to reduce toothbrush bacteria by up to 85%.
3. **Soak it in Listerine:** According to the ADA, Listerine brand mouthwash will also kill up to 85% of the bacteria on your toothbrush, which may be the most convenient remedy if you already use Listerine.
4. **Absolutely do not do this:** Whatever you do, do *not* put your toothbrush in the microwave or dishwasher, as high heat could melt or otherwise damage the brush.



How to put poo in its place

Even though the thought of a post-flush tornado raining bacteria all over your bathroom might make you want to stuff your toothbrush in the nearest bathroom drawer, that's actually not at all what the ADA recommends. The best way to store your toothbrush, according to another meta-analysis, is upright, in a toothbrush holder, uncovered so it can air-dry.

That means, ultimately, that the best way to keep the toilet particles off your toothbrush and where it belongs is to close the lid on your toilet each time you flush.

For an outside-the-box solution to another common bathroom problem, check out our favorite method for unclogging a toilet when you can't find a plunger. Your bathroom isn't the only thing around you harboring bacteria, either -- your phone screen is disgusting, too, but you have to be careful how you clean it or you could end up damaging it.

And if you have any smart speakers in your home, take care not to damage them when you clean with our guide to cleaning Alexa devices and our other guide for degunking Google Home speakers.

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