

No Sponges Are Allowed!

Written by Bradley Fowler, MA



Each morning, countless people awake and prepare for their day. They arrive at work, and head for that first cup of Java. Quite often, some employees spill coffee on the kitchen counter, and reach to grab the sponge often left on the kitchen sink. Unfortunately, what most office employees lack clarity on, is the level of bacteria left behind on those sponges, and how easy it is to become infected with a virus or get sick from E-Coli.

In fact, studies show, “kitchen sponges deserve attention in the household because they can remain wet and serve as a reservoir and vehicle for foodborne pathogens to cause illness. Kitchen sponges used to wash dishes containing foodborne pathogens transferred *Escherichia coli* to surfaces more frequently than *Salmonella*.” (Sharma, 2009, p. 1)

Yet even with such studies conducted, countless work office environments around the world still rely on the use of sponges in their employee kitchen.

However, studies show, “foodborne pathogens in an office kitchen environment, may spread with the use of kitchen sponges unless properly disinfected.” (2009)

That is, disinfected after every use, with a spoon size dose of bleach. Otherwise, studies show that, “untreated (control) sponges receiving no disinfecting treatment had control counts of 7.5 CFU (colony forming units) of aerobic bacteria/sponge and 7.3 CFU of yeasts and mold/sponge.” (2009)

Additional studies show using sponges to clean surfaces that may be contaminated with harmful bacteria, and then using them to sanitize dishes and faucet handles, enables bacteria to spread to other areas of the counter-top.

And even though studies such as this are conducted, time-and-again, countless corporate office environments continue using sponges to wipe down counter tops heavily used by office employees. This unhealthy practice increases the number of contaminants that collect on office kitchen surfaces.

Therefore, studies suggest, “the best course of action may be to limit the length of time a sponge is used or to eliminate the use of sponges in the kitchen altogether.” (Tate, 2006, p. 73)

Reference

Sharma, M., Eastridge, J., & Mudd, C. (2009). Elsevier: Food Safety Laboratory. p.1. Retrieved from: <https://naldc.nal.usda.gov/download/23351/PDF>

Tate, N. (2006). Saint Martin’s University Biology Journal. P. 73. Retrieved from: http://homepages.stmartin.edu/fac_staff/molney/website/SMU%20Bio%20Journal/Tate%202006.pdf