

Once warmer weather arrives, we think of airing out the house, and cleaning surfaces of winter dust.

The kitchen is usually one of the most frequently used rooms in a home. Here food is spilled, and grease splatters from cooking pans. I don't have to tell you about the predictable cleaning: counter tops, floors, shelves, etc. But there are some areas of the kitchen that you might not have thought about cleaning, and these can have a negative effect on the indoor air quality in your home.

Appliances that create airflow can spread contaminants. When was the last time you rolled your refrigerator out, so you could clean the top, bottom, back and sides? A refrigerator should be rolled out annually for such cleaning. Use a 36" vacuum crevice tool (available on line) to get to the coils and hard-to-reach areas. Look for a drip tray, either at the bottom front or behind a panel in back. Such trays can accumulate microbial growth (mold, bacteria, yeast). When the refrigerator fan turns on, airflows can carry these contaminants into the room. Remove the tray for cleaning a few times a year. Put two or three tablespoons of salt in the tray (only if plastic) to help inhibit microbial growth.



*A drip tray soiled with microbial growth*

Clean the area in which the refrigerator sits before rolling the appliance back in place. If your refrigerator has an automatic ice-maker, be sure not to break the water line as you move the appliance back and forth.

Another area of the kitchen that people don't always think of cleaning is the garbage disposer. Bits of food can accumulate in the disposer and lead to musty smells. You can pour some diluted bleach (one part bleach to ten parts water) down the disposer, and then run it for a minute or two, with the cold water faucet on. Be sure to step back before first turning the disposer on, however, since some bleach droplets may splash out. Since most dishwashers drain into the disposer, to avoid clogging, always run the disposer before operating the dishwasher.

If you have a kick-space heater in the kitchen, remove the grille so you can clean out the interior. Such spaces often accumulate food scraps that may fall from the counter. If the space is moistened due to mopping, mold growth may occur.



*A dirty kick space heater*



*Kick plate with yellow mold*

Inspect the kick spaces and kick plates at the bottom of your kitchen cabinets. These surfaces, too, can be covered with mold growth and can be cleaned with a dilute bleach solution or with any appropriate cleaning product.

You may have a small table in your kitchen where you eat or prepare meals. Many pieces of furniture (especially drop-leaf tables) that have been inherited or acquired in antique stores have at one point in time, been stored in a damp basement or garage. Such pieces can be covered with mold growth, especially along the bottom. When such furniture is moved, mold spores can become airborne, and unfortunately, mold remains potentially allergenic, even when dead.

Using a mirror and flashlight, you can look at the bottom of your kitchen table and chairs, to see if any oval spots of probable mold growth become visible. If so, the surface should be vacuumed and then sealed, either with clear shellac or with an Elmer's glue/water solution (one part glue to one to two parts water). This work is best done outdoors, but if you must do it indoors, isolate the work area as much as possible, and operate a window fan on exhaust. Whether you work indoors or out, wear gloves and a NIOSH N 95, two-strap mask (available in many building supply stores).



*Spots of mold on the bottom of a table.*

Refer to our book *The Mold Survival Guide: For Your Home and for Your Health* (on Amazon.com) for more cleaning tips as well as for instructions on how to look for mold growth.