

Should I Clean My Smartphone to Stay Safe from Coronavirus?

Three leading experts on microbiology and infectious disease said they do not clean their smartphones and do not recommend it as a way to stay safe from COVID-19.

WAIT! WHAT? Had you heard that smartphones are [dirtier than a toilet bowl](#)? Even academic studies, like [this one](#) from the Journal of Hospital Infection, have found considerable amounts of bacteria, including fecal matter, on phone screens.

And yet these experts said some variation of the same thing when I asked about combating coronavirus: **thoroughly clean your hands; don't touch your face; don't worry about your phone.**

Sure, except what if you're one of those people where your smartphone is basically an extension of your hand? What if I touch a dirty subway pole, then touch my phone, then my phone touches my face? What if someone sneezes directly on my iPhone screen? What if I'm the kind of person who licks my phone? (Don't judge.) [A recent study found](#) that, on surfaces such as metal, glass or plastic, coronavirus can survive for anywhere between two hours and nine days.

“It’s possible, theoretically, for this to live on a smartphone. If you had it out and someone sneezed or coughed on it and then you handled the phone, you could pick up infection that way,” says Daniel R. Kuritzkes, chief of the Division of Infectious Diseases at Brigham and Women’s Hospital. “People should keep their phones close to themselves. There is very little risk involved then.”

“My phone is the least of my concerns,” says Alex Berezow, a microbiologist and vice president at the American Council on Science and Health. “Worry about touching door handles that thousands of other people touch.”

Should I clean my smartphone?

Let's be very clear: Even when there isn't a [pandemic sweeping the globe](#), your phone can get dirty. Generally, that filth is not an issue, says Emma Hayhurst, a microbiologist at the University of South Wales and co-author on the aforementioned Journal of Hospital Infection paper. "We were trying to avoid mass panic about mucky phones. When you are healthy, it's really not a problem."

Translation: You should clean your phone—just not compulsively.

"We don't need to be obsessively washing our phones right now. If people are coming into contact with coronavirus patients, then, yes. Wash your phone all the time. Not because there is evidence that it will transmit via a phone but because there is no evidence that it won't," says Dr. Hayhurst.

How should I clean my smartphone?

It's long been the guidance of [Apple](#), [Samsung](#) and other phone makers to just use a microfiber cloth to shine up your device.

Infectious-disease experts say that to effectively kill the virus on a surface, you need disinfectant solution—for instance, something with at least 55% isopropyl alcohol.

Of course, the big question right now is, [where do you BUY the wipes?](#)

Can you use soap and water, as many have asked me? Sure, but avoid using rough paper towels or sponges on the screen. And never use bleach.

When cleaning with your disinfecting wipes, however, avoid getting liquid in the ports. Even if most phones are now water resistant, [that resistance wears over time.](#)

Can I damage my smartphone by cleaning it?

The big cleaning-solution fear cited by smartphone makers is damage to your phone screen's oleophobic layer. This is a protective coating on your screen that repels both water and oil. Basically, it helps minimize fingerprints and smudges.

“Cleaning products and abrasive materials will diminish the coating and might scratch your iPhone,” Apple’s website reads (i.e., don’t overdo it!).

Our anxieties are at an all-time high, understandably. If cleaning makes you feel better, grab some wipes and go to town. Your phone will be just fine. Just remember, you really don’t need to. Unless you’re one of those crazy phone lickers.