

# A Cleaner Toothbrush AND A HEALTHIER YOU

**F**or the past 18 months, we've been taking the necessary precautions to protect ourselves from the deadliest virus to emerge in most of our lifetimes. Vaccinations, social distancing, masking, and maintaining good hand hygiene have helped many Americans stay safe from COVID-19. However, with the emergence of the Delta variant and increasing cases and breakthrough cases, it doesn't look like we are out of the woods just yet. In addition, we are heading into flu—and good old-fashioned head cold—season, so you will want to be extra diligent when it comes to keeping yourself healthy. This includes making sure that you use and store your toothbrush correctly, because unless properly cared for, your toothbrush can become a breeding ground for germs and bacteria.

A toothbrush is designed to remove plaque and food particles from the teeth and gums, but in doing so, it can become contaminated with the bacteria, blood, saliva, and oral debris it removes. Unless cleaned properly, bacteria can flourish and be transferred back to you. Follow these tips to make sure your toothbrush is in tip-top shape so you, too, can be as healthy as possible.

- Rinse your toothbrush completely with water after brushing to remove any residue and toothpaste.
- Air dry your toothbrush thoroughly in an upright position.
- Don't let your toothbrush touch any other toothbrushes stored in the same holder—germs can be passed along that way.
- Replace your toothbrush after you've had any illness, as germs can remain on the toothbrush even after you've recovered. (This also means if you've tested positive for COVID-19 but are asymptomatic.) You also should replace it every three or four months, or if the bristles look worn and frayed.
- Don't share your toothbrush. If you have children, make sure that each child is using their own designated toothbrush. An easy solution for this is to "color code" toothbrushes for each member of your household (e.g., your toothbrush is always orange, Ian's toothbrush is always blue, Emma's is always green, etc.).
- If you use a disinfectant solution or mouthwash to rid your toothbrush of germs, be careful not to reuse the solution over a period of time or to disinfect multiple toothbrushes in the same solution.
- Don't routinely cover your toothbrush or store it in a closed container because the humid environment that closed storage promotes can lead to bacterial growth. If you insist on covering your toothbrush, be sure to clean the cover frequently.
- Keep your toothbrush away from contaminated areas, such as the toilet bowl. If your toothbrush holder is placed nearby, be sure to close the toilet seat cover before flushing to help prevent airborne bacteria from dispersing and landing on your toothbrush.