

# The New York Times

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## *Toothbrushes Can Spread Disease*

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### • The Facts

Of everything in a medicine cabinet, toothbrushes might seem the least harmful. Most dentists would disagree.

Bacteria thrive on toothbrushes which provide them with ample food and water. And toothbrushes sit in your home's most germ-laden room: the bathroom.

Researchers have found that streptococcus, staphylococcus,

influenza and herpes simplex I, among other pathogens, can survive on toothbrushes. The American Dental Association advises replacing your brush at least every three to four months. But microbes can make it their home long before then.

Bacteria and viruses on one brush can easily spread to another. Sharing your brush with someone else has been shown to cause sickness.

Bacteria prefer places that are warm, dark and moist - like a medicine cabinet - so Dr. R. Tom Glass at Oklahoma State University recommends keeping your brush out in the open near a bedroom window.

Motorized brushes attract more germs and can be hard on your gums. Instead, use a manual brush with a small, clear head. Replace it every two weeks, Dr. Glass said, or more often if you

are sick. People recovering from an illness reinfect themselves by using the same toothbrush.

### The Bottom Line

Toothbrushes are the perfect environment for germs and should be replaced often.

*By ANAHAD O'CONNOR*

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