

## Okay to reuse bath towels? <sup>[1]</sup>

Dear Alice,

Some of my family members insist on using the same towel for drying themselves perhaps 2 or more times before washing the towel. They claim that dirt and germs are washed off during bathing and that using the same towel and re-hanging it to use several more times is not unhealthful.... I disagree and say the towel then becomes bacteria infested and when they re-use it to dry themselves that they are putting this bacteria on their bodies. Thanks for looking at this.

### **Answer**

Dear Reader,

Your family members may be on to something! Although you're right that some bacteria may live on your towel, it's probably not enough to cause health problems. Experts generally recommend washing bath towels once a week (or after three to five uses). However, if your towels tend to stay damp, or if someone is sick in your home, you may want to wash them more frequently.

Washing towels more than once a week may be helpful when your towels are susceptible to excess bacteria growth and odor. For example, if your towels retain moisture for prolonged periods of time, bacteria growth may continue until they fully dry. This is a factor to consider if you live in a humid climate, if your towels are kept in a humid space (such as a bathroom), or if you notice your towels stay wet rather than drying all the way.

On the flip side, storing towels in ways that speed up the drying process may limit the amount of bacteria left on your towel. Consider the following tips for how to promote healthy towel hygiene and prevent bacteria growth:

- Hang your towel on a towel rack rather than a hook. This maximizes drying and keeps the towel as open as possible.
- Think about switching to microfiber towels. They dry faster, while towels with higher thread counts often require more time.
- Keep your towel hanging until you wash it — towels that sit in your hamper may spread bacteria to surrounding clothes.
- If possible, keep the bathroom door open so air might circulate.

- Follow the instructions for care on your towels. There are many variations of towels (differing from thread count to texture) which might come with different suggestions for temperatures, detergents, etc.
- Get off to a fresh start and make sure your towel is completely dry before leaving the dryer.
- If you use towels at the gym, try switching them out daily. Used towels that stay in your gym bag for hours on end may accelerate bacteria growth and bad odors.

You may also want to wash towels more frequently if you or someone in your home is sick or has a weaker immune system. This may be the case for the elderly, young children, those who are pregnant, or people with compromised immune systems.

Note that while washing towels may help limit the growth of bacteria, [handwashing](#) [2] is more helpful in preventing bacteria from spreading person-to-person. The bottom line is that if you routinely wash your towels and store them so that they dry properly between uses, you'll likely be in fine shape.

Shower on!

Alice!

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[Habits](#) [5]

[Miscellaneous](#) [6]

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[Why do I have to brush my teeth?!](#) [8]

[How often to wash hair?](#) [9]

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## Footer menu

### ▼ [Contact Alice!](#)

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- [1] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/okay-reuse-bath-towels>
- [2] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/how-to-wash-hands>
- [3] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/general-health>
- [4] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/body-maintenance>
- [5] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/habits>
- [6] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/miscellaneous-1>
- [7] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/are-washcloths-and-other-body-scrubbers-bacteria-factories-0>
- [8] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/why-do-i-have-brush-my-teeth-1>
- [9] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/how-often-wash-hair>