'Fall Cleaning' Challenges the Spring-Cleaning Myth

By ACSH Staff — September 28, 2015

Someone, somewhere, sometime ago came up with the feel-good idea which has been widely accepted that spring was the perfect time to give the house a good, comprehensive cleaning. But when you stop to think about it, and challenge that notion with a bit of logic, don't we have it backwards?

Shouldn't it, instead, be Fall Cleaning?

A British professor is advocating just that, and at least for areas that experience temperature change with the seasons there may be some sense to her thinking.

Dr. Lisa Ackerley, professor of environmental health at the University of Salford, postulates that as the weather becomes cooler in the fall, people turn on their central heating and shut their windows. Reducing the air circulation, in turn, creates a moist, damp environment, generating the perfect breeding ground for bacteria and dust mites to flourish. Vacuuming to clean the carpets and hard surface flooring is the only acceptable manner to minimize health hazards caused by these contaminants and impurities.

It is in the fall we spend more time indoors and the air quality, as estimated by the Environmental Protection Agency, might be five times more polluted than outdoor air. And this period is after we've left the windows open for months during the spring and summer, allowing dust and dirt to accumulate.

Dr. Ackerley, collected samples [1] from carpets in UK homes that appeared to be clean and found a significant amount of microbes and mold that cannot be seen with the naked eye. While collecting samples from carpets underneath the beds of teenagers she found the majority of samples were covered in bacteria (800,000 per gram of dust), bodily waste and food debris.

Of course, the Fall Cleaning concept applies mostly to locations that experience a variety of temperatures throughout the year. For year-round, warm-weather locales, Spring Cleaning still can make sense but just as much sense as Winter Cleaning and Summer Cleaning.

Dr. Ackerley also focused on a couple in their sixties that have asthma and secondary lung conditions, and found very high levels of bacteria (10 million per gram) from yeasts and mold. Dr. Ackerley's most jarring sample uncovered high levels of Staphylococcus aureus bacteria, which can lead to skin and wound infections, more commonly linked to food poisoning.

All told Dr. Ackerley surmised that we should take pride in cleaning all year round not just in the spring. It's necessary that we use well-maintained vacuum cleaners that have strong suction to remove debris from carpets and hard surface flooring.

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