You diligently scrub and scour your home, but still someone ends up with the flu bug. Where did that come from?

I bet there are places in your home that you really don’t think about being germy — and they are. That flu bug may mean a missed day of work or a trip to the doctor, costing your hard-earned dollars. Let’s look at some forgotten places that germs love to hide.

Handbags are carried everywhere, including into the bathroom. They are stored in the floor of your car, and you bring them in and set them on the kitchen counter. A recent study showed that 20 percent of handbags had enough germs on them to make you sick. If your bag is fabric or synthetic, it is easy to wipe down the surface with an antibacterial wipe. Leather requires a bit more care, so consider using saddle soap to clean it up. Take some extra time on the handles since that seems to be the germiest place.

Look inside the bag and check out that credit card. We’ve all been in a line somewhere and put our card in our mouth while juggling purchases — not a good idea. Your hands, the clerk’s hands and germs from your purse are most likely all over it. Use a little bit of alcohol on a cloth and it will clean up quickly.

Writing pens are another easy place to pick up germs, particularly the ones on the store counter. Clean up your pens in your purse with alcohol on a cloth and use them exclusively. Avoid using those on the counter if you can.

Cell phones are another germ carrier. In a recent research project, a mobile phone had 18 times more bacteria than a toilet handle. Use a little alcohol on a microfiber cloth and shine it up. In my house we have a cordless phone that is carried and left everywhere in the house. It should be cleaned a minimum of once a month. Again, alcohol and a cotton swab will get down in all those crevices to clean it up.

In the same way that your handbags get dirty, so does your luggage. Take a damp cloth with an antibacterial cleaner and run over the surface, playing close attention to the handles. Open them up and vacuum up all the crumbs and lint.
Dishwashers and washing machines help us keep everything clean at home. Have you ever washed these household appliances? It is a good idea to occasionally clean them up as well. Run your dishwasher empty with a cup of vinegar in it. This will help break down any hard water deposits and will also help get rid of lingering odors. The washer should be run as empty loads twice, once with two cups of bleach in the wash water and once with a cup of vinegar in the wash. Clean up the surfaces with a good cleaner and you are ready to go again.

Especially when someone in the house is sick, pay attention to doorknobs. Everyone touches them, sharing their germs with everyone in the house. Run over them first with a cleaner on a wet rag to get rid of grime, then follow up with an antibacterial wipe to kill any residual germs.

This world is a germy place. Make sure you keep these commonly touched surfaces clean to avoid sickness.

Roxie Rodgers Dinstel is associate director of Cooperative Extension Service, a part of the University of Alaska Fairbanks, working in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Questions or column requests can be e-mailed to her at rrdinstel@alaska.edu or by calling 907-474-7201.