

# What to Do *When There's* PINK in Your Sink

What is this pink residue in my bathroom? Pink residue is generally not a problem with water quality. In fact, pink residue is likely a result of airborne bacteria that produce a pinkish or dark gray film on regularly moist surfaces like toilet bowls, showerheads, sink drains, and tiles. Some people have also noted that the pink residue appears in their pet's water bowl, which causes no apparent harm to the pet and is easily cleaned off.

Due to the expense of having the bacteria tested, most homeowners never identify the exact type of bacteria that is causing their problem. However, many experts agree that the bacteria that causes these pink stains is most

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likely *serratia marcesens*, a bacteria which is found naturally in soil, food, and in animals. *Serratia*, which produce a characteristic red pigment, thrive on moisture, dust, and phosphates and need almost nothing to survive. These

bacteria were thought to be harmless until recently, when it was discovered that, in some people, *serratia marcesens* is a cause of urinary tract infections, wound infections, and pneumonia.

**How does this bacteria grow?** The pinkish film often appears during or after construction or remodeling, when dust and dirt containing *serratia* bacteria are stirred up. Once the bacteria are airborne, they will seek a moist location in which they can proliferate. Some people have reported that the pink residue only appears during certain times of the year, like when their windows are left open for most of the day. These bacteria are present in a number of environments and wind can carry the airborne bacteria or stir up dust in which the bacteria is present. The appearance of the pink residue can be intensified by the use of activated carbon filters, which remove chlorine from the water. The absence of the normal levels of chlorine in tap water allows *serratia* to thrive.

**How do I get rid of the pink residue?** The best solution to this problem is to continually clean the involved surfaces to keep them free from bacteria. Chlorinous compounds work best, but keep in mind that abrasive cleaners may scratch fixtures,



making them more susceptible to bacterial growth. Chlorine bleach can be used periodically to disinfect the toilet and help to eliminate the occurrence of the pink residue. An easy way to do

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this is to stir three to five tablespoons of fresh bleach to the toilet tank, flush the toilet to allow the bowl to be disinfected, and add another dose of bleach to the tank as it is refilling. Use of a toilet cake that contains a disinfectant can keep residual disinfectant present in the toilet at all times. By keeping bathtubs and sinks wiped down and dry, the formation of pink residue can be avoided. Cleaning these surfaces with a solution that contains chlorine will also help to minimize the occurrence of pink residue.

## *Serratia marcescens*—the pink nuisance

A problem that rears its ugly "head" (literally) across the entire country is an airborne bacteria that frequently announces its presence with a pink film (occasionally gray) in toilets and other bathroom fixtures.

Because the bacterium is airborne, it frequently strikes in the spring and summer when windows are opened to the home.

The culprit, according to experts, is probably the species *Serratia marcescens*, a harmless nuisance organism.

*Serratia* are like HPC organisms—not very harmful to the general population.

The best treatment for the bug is for homeowners to keep these surfaces clean using chlorine bleach

on a regular basis.

Three to five tablespoons of chlorine added to bowl water, then flushed should do the trick.

Of course, a toilet cake containing disin-

fectant will help keep the flora to a minimum after treatment.

By keeping sinks, tubs, and showers wiped down and also using a bathroom cleaner containing chlo-

rine, homeowners can keep *Serratia* at bay as well.