

Dirty Talk: What's Really On Your Cell Phone?

KTLA Special Investigation

Cell Phone Bacteria

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LOS ANGELES -- A recent study showed serious superbug bacteria on the cell phones of some hospital workers, and it got us wondering, how dirty are cell phones in our newsroom? We called in the experts.

"Bathrooms are a definite place you don't want to leave them," says Dennis Ironi of Andersen Consulting. "But I would say letting other people use your phone, that's the largest source of bacterial contamination."

Dennis Ironi came to KTLA's newsroom to test our cell phones for bacteria. After ten days, we got the results.

Ten out of eleven phones had bacteria on them, including staphylococcus, micrococcus, and bacillus, in amounts large enough to potentially make you sick.

"These bacteria are always around us, just like mold," says Ironi "And really the dose makes the poison."

Will you get sick? That depends on how much bacteria you are exposed to, how strong your immune system is, and how often you spread the germs from your phone to other places.

Ironi says the biggest source of contamination is your fingers, and if you touch your phone and then your mouth, eyes and nose, you could make yourself sick.

Our phones had live bacteria on them that experts say could live there for up to a week. Where did they pick up that bacteria? Maybe from something as simple as letting a friend make a call.

"You never know where that phone has been," says Ironi. "Now you know that there's an added risk when you let them use your phone."

It is not regular dirt that hurts you, but germs you cannot see without a microscope. And at work, it is not just your phone.

"The three germiest surfaces were telephones, keyboards, and the desktop," says environmental expert Michael Andrew. "So every time you put your hand down on the desktop, you're touching about 10 million bacteria."

Andrew says a recent study in the United Kingdom showed cell phones were dirtier than toilets, and dirtier than the bottom of your shoe from a germ standpoint.

If all this "dirty talk" makes you not want to use your cell phone, do not despair. You can easily kill the germs with an antibacterial wipe, or a cotton ball soaked in rubbing alcohol. Experts say you should do it every few days.

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