



Fast-Food Ice Dirtier Than Toilet Water

Seventh-Grader's Science Project Turns Up Some Disturbing Results

Feb. 20, 2006 — - Jasmine Roberts never expected her award-winning middle school science project to get so much attention. But the project produced some disturbing results: 70 percent of the time, ice from fast food restaurants was dirtier than toilet water.

The 12-year-old collected ice samples from five restaurants in South Florida -- from both self-serve machines inside the restaurant and from drive-thru windows. She then collected toilet water samples from the same restaurants and tested all of them for bacteria at the University of South Florida.

In several cases, the ice tested positive for E. coli bacteria, which comes from human waste and has been linked to several illness outbreaks across the country.

"These [bacteria] don't belong there," said Dr. David Katz, medical contributor to "Good Morning America." "It's not cause for panic, although it is alarming because what she found is nothing new. You're not more likely to get sick now. But she's done us a favor by sounding the alarm."

Both Roberts and Katz said that the ice is likely dirtier because machines aren't cleaned and people use unwashed hands to scoop ice. Toilet water is also surprisingly bacteria-free, because it comes from sanitized city water supplies.

Support from Big Brother

Roberts got interested in the project after reading a newspaper article about bacteria in airplane water and decided to do something similar. Plus, she said, all of her friends chew on ice, and it drives her crazy.

"I just picked the not-obvious choice," the seventh-grader said of her project.

Her 18-year-old brother, Justus, is also an award-winning science fair veteran who said he has encouraged his little sister's interest in science.

Justus said when Jasmine told him her idea for this project, "I gave her a high five, then said, 'You're a strange little kid.' But I supported her all the way."

The restaurants also have taken notice of Roberts' project. Two began new sanitary policies and have asked her to come back and do her tests again.

"First they appreciated the project," she said. "And one location even asked me to come back and test the temperature of their food."

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