



## Watch out for germs at cosmetic counters

You may want to think twice before trying on lip gloss. Janice Lieberman, 'Today' consumer correspondent, says you could pick up harmful bacteria

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Today show

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OK, ladies, the new fall make up colors are out. You can't walk into a department store these days without being assaulted by a makeup artist trying to give you a new "look" for the season. And you've have probably been enticed, as I have been, to try some of latest lipsticks, eye shadows, and creams. When you're feeling blah, it's hard to resist sitting down and presenting your face to a stranger wielding brushes for an instant makeover. You sit still as the professional dips her brushes into testers and proceeds to paint your face. Afterwards, you look in the mirror, appreciate your transformation, and buy the makeup.

But you may be bringing home more than just fall's latest colors. The U.S. Consumer Product and Safety Commission reports that thousands of people contract skin and eye irritations from shared testers.

The "Today" show decided to take a look at just how clean those cosmetic testers are at major retailers. With our hidden camera in tow and the help of Connie Morbach, a microbiologist who specializes in environmental germ detection at [Sanit Air](#) in Troy, Mich., we swabbed several makeup testers to look for germs. We chose a store where samples were readily available for anyone to try. But even before we tested the makeup, we were surprised to see just how many women dipped their fingers in the makeup pots, applying shadow to their eyes and gloss to their lips. Many did not even use applicators made available to them. Just imagine all those fingers, spreading germs to all the other customers.

Morbach was appalled and decided to test several cosmetic containers. She swabbed them and then brought them to Sanit Air's testing lab. Four weeks later the results were in. Put down your makeup brushes ladies ... and listen to this! We found staphylococcus in most of the samples. While this is a bacterium that is often found on surfaces that people touch, but some samples contained an infectious species of staphylococcus. If it comes in contact with your eyes, it could cause pink eye, and if you have a cut or broken skin, you could get a staph infection.

"I found human-related bacteria in all of the makeup," Morbach says. "I found it in the lipstick, the brushes, the lip gloss, the eye shadow. So if you happened to use a Q-tip when someone else didn't, and you put that on your eye, you're still transferring the bacteria to your own eye."

In fact, one of the "Today" show producers came down with pink eye, which spread from one of her eyes to the other, after she had a makeover. It took three and a half weeks for the infection to clear up. She and her doctor think she could have picked up bacteria from cosmetics applied to her eyes at an upscale department store, even though says she watched the makeup artist clean her brushes. Scary stuff!

And there's more. Seven out of nine samples Morbach tested had enteric bacteria. That is bacteria related to our digestive systems. That kind of bacteria can cause mild cases of diarrhea and stomach aches in healthy people and more serious gastrointestinal problems in those who have compromised immune systems. And we found more. Streptococcus, which can cause strep throat, was found in almost half of our samples. All of the samples from the makeup testers were

contaminated with common bacteria, which means, according to Morbach, that other germs, such as viruses, could also be present. We didn't test viruses.

The good news is that when Morbach tested brand-new, unopened containers of cosmetics, they weren't contaminated.

**Janice Lieberman's Bottom Line:** So our best advice for looking pretty this fall? Check out the new colors by using a clean applicator and applying it to your hand to see if you like the shade. Morbach says that's a lot safer than rubbing people's germs on your eyes or your mouth. Happy Shopping!

*Janice Lieberman is the "Today" show's consumer correspondent. She joined NBC News as a consumer reporter in 1999. She is author of "Tricks of the Trade: A Consumer Survival Guide." She is a graduate of Rutgers University.*

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