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Are Cell Phones Germ Breeders?

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(CBS) A British microbiologist claims the average cell phone carries more germs per square inch than doorknobs, the soles of shoes, even toilet seats

The Daily Mail newspaper quotes Joanna Verran, a professor of microbiology at Manchester Metropolitan University as saying, "Mobile phones are stored in bags or pockets, are handled frequently and held close to the face. In other words, they come into contact with more parts of our body and a wider range of bacteria than toilet seats. The phones (from which cultures were taken) contained more skin bacteria than any other object. This could be due to the fact that this type of bacteria increase in high temperatures and our phones are perfect for breeding these germs as they are kept warm and cozy in pockets, handbags and briefcases."

So, could the devices be a health hazard?

On *The Early Show* Friday, medical correspondent **Dr. Emily Senay** noted that, of nothing else, the report is "creating a lot of buzz, like, 'Exactly what are we doing to ourselves with these cell phones? Are we transmitting germs? How big of a problem is it?'"

To put it in perspective, Senay said, "Germs are everywhere. They're on every doorknob; they're all over our bodies. We are colonized with them, including some germs that can be dangerous if we were to develop a weakened immune system.

"So, it really shouldn't be any surprise that our cell phones ... would be great conduits for germs." But Senay questioned the assertion that the warmth of cell phones could make them more likely to harbor germs, saying she spoke to "a couple of experts who said that's something that would really have to be studied to prove that were true. Some think the warmth of the cell phone may actually kill the germs. So, I'm not so sure about that angle of it.

"Nevertheless, if you think about it, it makes a lot of sense. If I have my phone and have a little cold and you need to borrow it, I've just passed it (the cold) to you."

The bottom line, at least for now, said Senay, is that, "There are no scientific studies that we were able to turn up, or that I'm aware of, that would suggest that people have gotten sick or that this is a major public health problem, cell phones. It stands to reason, though, that if someone does have a germ and they pass it around to other people, or they've picked up a germ somewhere, used their cell phone and brought it to their face, they could potentially be passing germs to themselves."

Are there steps that could be taken to minimize any risk?

"The first thing we should all do all the time," Senay said, "whenever we've gone to the bathroom or cooked in our kitchen or shaken hands with somebody, is wash our hands. Washing your hands is a great way to reduce all sorts of infections.

"The second thing, which some manufacturers and cell phone technicians recommend, is that you use (antibacterial) wipes. Simply wipe the phone down, avoiding, obviously, the charging port and the battery, and that is something you should do sort of frequently to keep the germs off the cell phone.

"One other thing: Some companies are actually coming out now with germ-resistant cell phones. Motorola is making (one). That would be for people who are really paranoid. This claims to have a coating that will inhibit bacteria and mold growth."

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