

## BE WELL

### Heed the Call of Cell Phones' Dirty Little Secret

By **Debbie DeAngelo**  
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After visiting a public restroom, do you use a paper towel to open the door? Before wielding a grocery cart, do you clean the handle with the disinfectant wipe provided by the store? At the end of each day, do you clean your cell phone?

Wait ... the cell phone? Should this even be on our to-do list? I'll let you be the judge of that.

Research shows that cell phones are dirtier than people realize. This is in part due to all of the traveling they do each day as they accompany us everywhere. From the steering wheel of the car to elevator buttons to gas pumps, we accumulate germs on our hands, which we then transfer to our phone. Then, of course, we must consider the surface upon which we lay our phone. Think about your activities on a typical day. You have a photo that you'd like your coworkers to view ... so you pass around your phone. You run into the local convenience store for a cup of coffee, then enjoy a few sips while sitting in your car a moment scrolling through your texts ... after touching numerous surfaces, handles, and money in the store. You meet a friend at a restaurant for lunch and use the bathroom before leaving ... where many people use the opportunity to talk or text. Get the picture?

Aside from the "yuck" factor, do all these situations really make a difference to your health? A British study found that one in six cell phones harbored fecal material. A study conducted at the University of Arizona revealed that your electronic bestie is 10 times filthier than your commode. Yet another group of

scientists cultured the mobile phones of secondary school students aged 16 to 18 and found the phones averaged 17,000 bacterial genes.

Hard to believe?

When is the last time you cleaned your bathroom? A week ago? That's right; your bathroom gets cleaned on a regular basis. Your phone – not so much. Further compounding matters is the fact that we finger our phones continually; 47 times a day to be exact, according to a mobile consumer survey by Deloitte. And based upon my observations, I find that number to be low.

As bad as this all sounds, it wouldn't be a problem if for two things: You're constantly fingering the phone screen and then rubbing your eyes or eating without washing your hands every time, and, when talking on your cell, it's close to your face and mouth. This results in the seamless transmission of germs.

Before you become too grossed-out, remember that there are ways we can remain plugged in without becoming sick from our communication sidekick. Implement these three strategies for debugging your cell, as well as all of your electronic devices.

**Swipe it.** At least once a week, wipe it down with a disinfectant product specifically made for electronics. Avoid liquids or sprays as they may damage your phone. Although it's best to check with the manufacturer of your phone, many companies have claimed that their products hold up well against disinfectant wipes such as Clorox, Lysol or isopropyl alcohol. Using a screen protector allows you to clean the touchable surface without coming into direct contact with the screen. The same thing goes for a phone cover. Allow the phone to air dry for a few minutes and if the screen appears streaky, gently wipe with a microfiber cloth. Smartphones and other electronic devices are expensive, so be sure to do your homework before reaching for a cleaning product. Alternatively, there are products made specifically for cell phones that use ultraviolet rays for disinfection.

**Hold on.** Want to show someone a photo or video? Hold it up for them to view, so they don't transfer the germs from their hands onto your phone. Along the same lines, using the speaker phone or blue tooth function minimizes handling and keeps the phone away from your face.

**Wash your hands.** Clean hands make for a clean phone. Whenever you can, choose soap and water over hand sanitizer and scrub for at least 20 seconds. Be sure to do so when preparing and eating food; touching communal surfaces; rubbing your eyes or handling contact lenses; going to the bathroom, changing a diaper or picking up after your pet; blowing your nose, coughing, and sneezing; and caring for a sick person.

One final hygiene hint. Don't overlook disinfecting other items that people commonly share. These include keyboards, remote controls, appliance control panels, and the audio panel in your vehicle.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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