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Why You Seriously Need to Stop Taking Your Phone Into the Bathroom

Here's some scream-inducing information about your filthy, filthy phone.



If you're like most people, your phone might as well be superglued to your hand. It seems like the need to take that little device everywhere with you—including the bathroom—is now just part of the human condition. But

taking your phone into the bathroom with you is actually really weird when you think about it. Is it necessary to scroll through Instagram while you're *on the toilet*, a time when your hands will have to venture dangerously close to some extremely germey regions of your body? No, health experts say. No it is not. Here's why.

Your phone is already dirty enough without your (potentially pathogenic) poop particles all over it.

The actual amount of bacteria on each person's phone varies, and there's an unfortunate lack of solid, large-scale research on the subject. At the very least, experts can tell you that your phone is pretty dirty. "It is not uncommon for us to detect 100,000 [bacteria and viruses] on cell phones, making them one of the germiest environments we come in contact with on a daily basis," microbiologist Kelly Reynolds, Ph.D., an associate professor of environmental and occupational health at the University of Arizona, tells SELF.

Of course, not all germs and bacteria will make you sick. It's really just the pathogens—disease-causing bacteria—that you need to worry about. And, yes, your phone may be covered in some of those, too. Pathogens can lurk in fecal matter, like the highly contagious norovirus and rotavirus, which can both cause food poisoning and the stomach flu, along with cold and flu viruses, Reynolds says. Your phone can also house bacteria like *E. coli*, *campylobacter*, and *shigella*, she adds, which can all cause food poisoning, according to the Mayo Clinic.

It's not like you have to dunk your phone in poop for it to wind up crawling with pathogens.

In the bathroom, you're touching surfaces other people have touched, often after their hands have been near germey body parts. This increases the odds you'll pick up germs from other people and transfer them to your phone.

Plus, every time you flush the toilet with the lid open, it sprays a plume of aerosolized germs into the air. Those germs can then land on surfaces in your bathroom, making these areas all kinds of dirty, Reynolds says. "Setting your phone on any of these surfaces can easily contaminate the phone," she says.

Ultimately, the end result is that bringing your phone up to your face could also bring along other people's germs and toilet plume grossness, Reynolds says.

Before you consider tossing your phone in the garbage, it's important to remember that having this stuff on your phone isn't an automatic guarantee that you'll get sick. Otherwise we'd all be ill way more often. But environments that are dirtier, like bathrooms, usually have a higher potential for harboring germs that *can* make you sick, Reynolds says. So why risk it?

The reasons why you do or don't get sick when exposed to pathogens are multifactorial, Reynolds says: "How often you touch your phone, other surfaces, and your face—along with other behaviors—influences risk of exposure." Your overall immunity, handwashing habits, and how often you disinfect your phone all come into play here, she says.

Disinfecting your phone is tricky business, but it's super important.

Again, don't dunk it in anything. Disinfecting your phone should start with reading your manufacturer's instructions, which should mention how to do this safely. For example, Apple recommends against using cleaning products or abrasive materials on an iPhone, since it can damage the screen's oleophobic (anti-oil) coating. Using a screen protector, however, may make that a non-issue.

Your best bet is to use a product that's formulated specifically to clean phone screens, like these towelettes from Sephora. You can also try mixing up a diluted alcohol solution and applying it with a microfiber cloth.

Don't forget, your dirty phone can mess with your skin, too.

Some bacteria, like *Staphylococcus aureus* can cause both food poisoning and acne. The former means it may be present in bathrooms after someone with food poisoning poops or vomits, and the latter means it can screw up the skin on your face.

"I often see acne worse on one side of the face versus the other, and when asked, most patients admit that the side where they hold their phone is the worse side," Gary Goldenberg, M.D., assistant clinical professor of dermatology at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in New York City, tells SELF.

That's why he recommends that people talk hands-free as much as possible, practice good hand hygiene, wash their faces often enough, and regularly disinfect their phones.

It makes sense that you would want some kind of distraction in the bathroom—just try to leave your phone out of it.

Listen, we get it: Going to the bathroom can be boring or even stressful. For instance, if you have paruresis, which is a phobia that makes it really hard to pee when others are around, distraction can be an essential part of relaxing. "Sitting down and focusing attention on something other than the bladder will help the pelvic floor muscles to release and facilitate more complete bladder emptying," David Kaufman, M.D., director of Central Park Urology, a division of Maiden Lane Medical, tells SELF.

And for people with constipation, just sitting on the toilet and waiting for poop to come out can be mind-numbingly dull. Theoretically, this could lead to forcing the issue in a rush to get back out into the world, which can cause anal fissures (painful little tears in your anal tissue) or hemorrhoids (piles of bulging veins in and around your anus). Distracting yourself until you're able to go can be helpful, Ashkan Farhadi, M.D., a gastroenterologist at MemorialCare Orange Coast Medical Center and director of MemorialCare Medical Group's Digestive Disease Project in Fountain Valley, Calif., tells SELF.

So, what's a pee-shy, constipated, or simply bored person to do? Make like it's the '80s and read a book or magazine in the bathroom instead of looking at your phone. Yes, you'll likely still be getting bathroom germs all over the book or magazine in question. But, unlike your phone, you probably won't be carrying this newly germy object around with you all day long.

If you absolutely *have* to take your phone into the bathroom with you, there are a few things you can do to at least tone down the grossness.

The first is to avoid setting your phone down on any surfaces while you do your business so it doesn't pick up those germs, Reynolds says. It's also a good idea to disinfect your phone after it's been your bathroom buddy. Yes that means after *every single time* you take it in with you.

This is harder than it sounds.

Technically you'd need to designate one hand as your phone hand and allow it to touch only the phone, not anything else in the bathroom. When it's time to wash and dry your hands, you'd need to put your phone down on enough paper towel to avoid it touching a surface (or soaking up water from the surface). After that, you'd have to wrap the phone in a different paper towel—but without touching it, since your hands are clean but the phone isn't—and carry it outside the bathroom, where you can finally disinfect it, Reynolds says. Honestly, this sounds exhausting, and it's completely avoidable if you just leave your phone outside of the bathroom where it belongs.