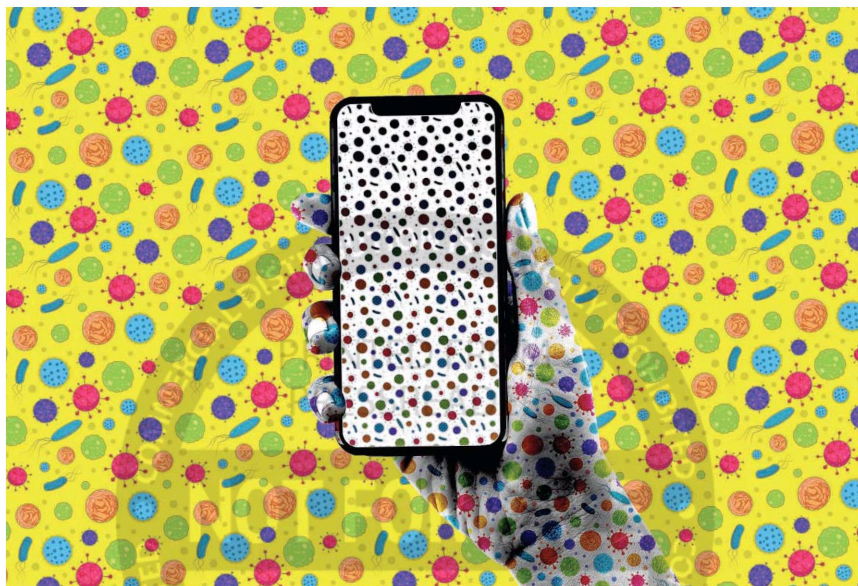


Germ-laden device is next to your face

Smartphones are filthy; here's how to avoid getting sick



JEFF RUBLE/USA TODAY NETWORK AND GETTY IMAGES

Dalvin Brown USA TODAY

What's the one item that never leaves your side? ■ It goes into the bathroom with you. You use it in the kitchen. It often touches your face, your desk and, well, just about any other surface within arm's reach. ■ It's your smartphone, of course. And these are just some of the reasons it's a breeding ground for germs and a cesspool of bacteria. ■ Don't take just our word for it.

Fecal matter can be found on 1 out of every 6 smartphones, according to a 2011 study by researchers at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine.

"Mobile phones have become veritable reservoirs of pathogens as they touch faces, ears, lips and hands of different users of different health condi-

tions," researchers said in a 2009 study of bacteria removed from personal phones.

A study by the University of Arizona found the typical worker's desk, which tends to be your smartphone's home for about 40 hours a week, has hundreds of times more bacteria per square inch than an office toilet seat.

Other studies have found serious pathogens on smartphones such as *Streptococcus*, MRSA – a type of bacteria that is resistant to several antibiotics – and even *E. coli*.

So why is your phone so nasty?

"We touch more surfaces than any generation in history, from ATM machines to self-checkout counters," said Dr. Charles Gerba, a professor of microbiology at the University of Arizona. "So you're picking up germs all the time on your hands and fingers, putting them on your cellphone and bringing them close to your nose, mouth or eyes."

These germs can make you, your family and anyone else you come in contact with sick. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates 80 percent of all infections are transmitted by hands, and our smartphones

See GERMS, Page 2B

Germs

Continued from Page 1B

have basically become an extension of that.

"Mobile phones are now mobile germ devices," Gerba said. "You get a germ on your hand, and you use your phone. Then you go wash your hands later, but the germs are still on your phone."

On average, Americans check their phone once every 12 minutes – burying their heads in their phones 80 times a day, according to global tech protection company Asurion. That's plenty of opportunities for microorganisms to migrate between your fingers and your phone.

The worst culprits are teenagers, said Gerba, whose research found that people who work in the food service industry along with adults who work with children tend to get the most contamination on their hands.

Think about all the surfaces you touch throughout the day, from light switches to remote controls to bathroom doors. All of the bacteria picked up ends up on your devices, and odds are, you don't clean them often or well enough.

"All cellphones are going to have bacteria on them because we hold them up to our face," says Susan Whittier, director of clinical microbiology at New York-Presbyterian and Columbia University Medical Center.

"Normal bacteria that's being transferred from cheeks and ears isn't anything to worry about. But, if you're coughing into your phone, those viruses can live on those surfaces for hours and can be transferred to others."



GETTY IMAGES