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Germ Patrol: The Shopping Mall

Heading to the mall to check out the latest spring fashions? You may want to bring along some hand cleaner!

Turns out malls are full of more than just cool clothes and gadgets. They're also loaded with germs!

Here are some of the dirtiest spots – and how to handle them:

ATM. Unfortunately, cash may not be all you pick up here. Researchers found germs on every button tested on ATM keypads. *Hint: Use knuckles instead of fingertips to tap keys. And wash or sanitize hands when done.*

Escalator. Researchers found traces of sweat, waste matter and blood on 20 percent of escalator rails tested. *Hint: Avoid touching. If you must to be safe, clean hands afterward.*

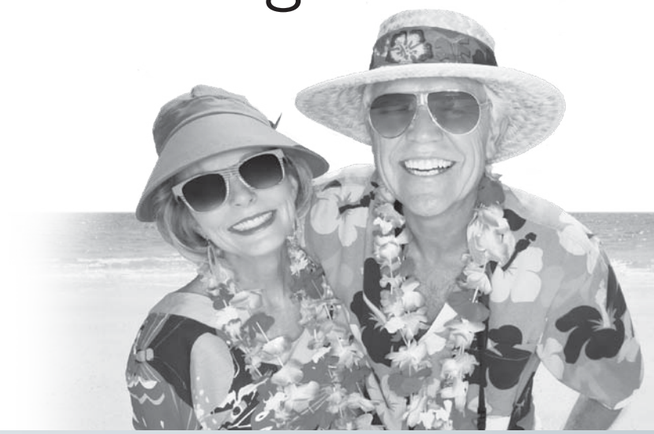
Restroom. Researchers report restroom soap dispensers – of all things – are mega germ magnets. One in four tested contained waste and other germs. *Hint: Scrub hands thoroughly with hot water for 15 to 20 seconds after lathering up.*

Fitting room. Research found people often leave germs on clothes they try. *Hint: Always wear underwear. And cover cuts before trying on stuff.*

Makeup counter. One study found 67 percent to 100 percent of makeup counter testers contained bacteria. *Hint: Don't apply. Buy and try makeup. And return if you don't like it.*

Spring 2012

Smart Living with COPD



IN THIS ISSUE:

Sun Safety: Lighten Up
Smoking Dims Memory
Secondhand Smoke Ups Kids' Risk
Avoid Scented Sprays and Candles
COPD? Hold the Ham!
Germ Patrol: The Shopping Mall

Sun Safety: Lighten Up

It's time for a refresher course on sun safety.

Let's start with how the sun actually burns your skin. Its ultraviolet (UV) light cuts through skin layers, and kills cells beneath that normally make new skin. When that happens, blood flow increases to the burned areas, turning skin red and warm.

But a little burn never hurt anyone, right? *Wrong!*

Experts say UV rays can change cells. And cause cancer and early wrinkling.

Over a million cases of skin cancer are diagnosed in the U.S. each year. About 70,000 are melanoma, the deadliest kind. Melanoma is very dangerous, because it can spread to other organs.

The good news is skin cancer can be prevented and treated if found early. The No. 1 way to reduce risk is to limit UV exposure.

Other tips: Wear an SPF 30 (or higher) broad-spectrum (UVA and UVB) sunscreen daily. Cover up (long-sleeves, sunglasses, wide-brim hat) in the sun. And don't use tanning beds!

Reality check. *Tanning beds are not safe.* Research shows regular use triples – and in some cases even *quadruples* – melanoma risk.

Melanoma is one of the fastest-growing cancers among whites. The number of cases jumped about 2 percent each year between 1997 and 2006. During the same period, indoor tanning skyrocketed.

The World Health Organization recently raised tanning beds to its highest cancer risk category, citing research showing:

- One burn in a tanning bed equals 10 to 12 sunburns.
- Use of tanning beds before age 30 ups melanoma risk by 75 percent.

Remember that next time you think about ducking into a tanning salon.

Still crave that sun-kissed look? Try a sunless tanning spray or lotion!

Smoking Dims Memory

A new study found smoking isn't only bad for your body. It may also hurt your mind.

Researchers at University College in London studied the memory, verbal and reasoning skills of 5,000 men and 2,000 women. Their average age was 56 when the 10-year study began.

The findings, published in the journal *Archives of General Psychiatry*: men who smoked suffered much greater mental decline than non-smokers.

In fact, smoking sped up their mental aging process so much, their brains functioned like they were 10 years older than their real age, researchers found.

"For example, a 50-year-old male smoker showed a similar cognitive decline as a 60-year-old male never-smoker," lead study author Severine Sabia said.

The good news: Men who quit smoking over 10 years earlier did as well on the skills tests as those who had never smoked.

But men who kicked butts less than a decade before didn't score much better than those who continued to smoke.

Researchers said smoking impairs the body's ability to deliver blood, oxygen and nutrients the brain needs to function. So this may be a culprit. Chemicals in cigarettes – many poisonous and known cancer-causing agents – may also be to blame.

The study did not find a link between smoking and memory loss in women. But researchers said that could just be because there were fewer women in the study. Or because women in this age group don't smoke as much as men.

Ready to give up smoking? Great. Your body – and your mind – will thank you!

Secondhand Smoke Ups Kids' COPD Risk

Still smoke? Here's yet *another* reason to stop. You could be making your kids sick.

Cigarette smoke raises the risk of and worsens just about every medical condition. Cancer, heart and lung disease, blood pressure, type 2 diabetes – you name it.

And smokers aren't the only ones hurt. Studies show secondhand smoke puts *everyone* exposed at risk.

Now a new study, published in the journal *Respirology*, finds children who grow up surrounded by secondhand smoke are nearly *twice as likely* as those from non-smoking homes to develop chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).

Researchers found girls were 1.9 times more likely, and boys were 1.5 to 1.7 times more likely to get COPD as adults if they grew up around smokers.

"Our results suggest that the long-term burden of COPD could be reduced if children were not exposed to cigarette smoke," said study author Ane Johannessen, a researcher at Haukeland University Hospital in Bergen, Norway. "Further, they indicate that factors affecting early-life development of lung function have important long-term consequences for adult life."

So if you smoke – quit. Your life – and your kids – may depend on it!

Avoid Scented Sprays and Candles

Do you like scented candles and sprays? How about those plug-in air fresheners? Beware.

They may smell like an ocean breeze. But they're not so sweet for people with allergies and asthma. In fact, they can be downright dangerous.

A study found a third of people with asthma are extremely sensitive to chemicals. And more than a third reported irritation from scented products.

"The chemicals in some of these products can trigger nasal congestion, sneezing and a runny nose," said Stanley Fineman, president of the American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology. "With asthmatics, there's really good data showing their lung function changes when they're exposed to these compounds."

So how can you make your house smell good without these fake fragrances?

Do what real estate agents do to make houses seem more inviting. *Bake chocolate chip cookies. Or put a pot of water with cinnamon sticks, cloves and cider on the stove.*

COPD? Hold the Ham!

Are you a fan of ham, salami, bacon and other cured meats? May be time to cutback!

Spanish researchers found people with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) who eat more than a slice of ham or other cured meat a day are more likely to have flare-ups and end up in the hospital.

Researchers followed 274 COPD patients for three years.

Participants ate an average of 23 grams of cured meat each day. That's about a slice of ham.

The findings, published recently in the *European Respiratory Journal:* 35 percent of the patients suffered flare-ups that landed them back in the hospital.

The ones who ate more than a slice of ham (or the equivalent of another type of cured meat) a day were more likely to be re-hospitalized, and to be hospitalized sooner than patients who went lighter on the cured meats.

Previous studies showed that eating a lot of cured or processed meats ups the risk of *developing* COPD.

This study shows it can also make the disease *worse.*

Researchers aren't sure why. But they believe preservatives called nitrites in cured meats may damage lung tissue.

To reduce the risk of COPD flare-ups, researchers recommend you take it easy on the cured meats. Even better – skip them.

Other tips for breathing easier: Don't smoke. Stick to your treatment plan. Eat right. And exercise (as directed by your doctor).