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Pulse on Health by Jeff Hansel

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01/08/2009

Don't touch that door handle

Here's a little bit of frankly disgusting commentary from Mayo Clinic infectious disease specialist Dr. Greg Poland.

The topic, slightly off-base from the interview subject, came up during a recent interview about pandemic influenza. To make the point that people aren't aware of how easily infectious illness can spread, Poland brought up his daughter's high-school science project.

"We're not very good about taking adequate precautions, and the public has no real understanding of the transmissibility of microbes," Poland said.

Door handles on Mayo Clinic bathrooms (both male and female) were swabbed and the samples placed in a growth chamber.

"The next day my lab manager calls me and said, 'What did you put in there?'" Poland said.

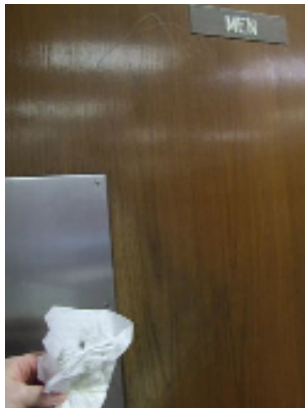
The microbes from the samples had grown so fast that they outgrew their containers and overflowed, oozing like the beginning of a B-horror-movie creature.

Bathroom door handles, Poland said "are massively contaminated with fecal organisms."

"These cultures completely contaminated our incubators (they) poured out and grew so fast," he said. Almost all had fecal coliform bacteria.

You use the rest room, turn the faucet on with dirty hands, wash, then turn the dirty faucet off with the same hands. Next, you've got to grab that door handle, which, Poland says, is filthy. He said it would actually be "better to put your hands in the toilet water."

Here's a photo after a couple swipes with a paper towel on the bathroom door handle in the news room.



On that happy note, back to the print edition...

[Pulse on Health](#)

By Jeff Hansel, member Association of Health Care Journalists
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Posted by at 10:16:16 AM in Hand washing

Technorati
Tags: bacteria, bath, bathroom, bulletin, dirty, disease, diseases, door handle, fecal,

flush, foodborne, germ, germs, Greg Poland, Gregory Poland, handles, illness, infectious, Mayo Clinic, microb, microbes, Minn., Minnesota, MN, paper, paper towels, post, rest, rest room, restroom, Rochester, room, specialist, tissue, toilet, toiletpaper, towel, towels, water

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