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One in six mobile phones contain E. coli

By Thomas Hannah on Friday 14 October 2011

A study has found that one in six British mobile phones contain traces of E. coli and nine in ten phones are coated with some kind of bacteria. The most likely reason for this is people failing to wash their hands regularly.

[Wikipedia/Next-up organization: Escherichia Coli, commonly abbreviated E. coli, is a Gram-negative, rod-shaped bacterium that is commonly found in the lower intestine of warm-blooded organisms (endotherms). Most E. coli strains are harmless, but some serotypes can cause serious food poisoning in humans, and are occasionally responsible for product recalls. The harmless strains are part of the normal flora of the gut, and can benefit their hosts by producing vitamin K2, and by preventing the establishment of pathogenic bacteria within the intestine.

E. coli and related bacteria constitute about 0.1% of gut flora and fecal-oral transmission is the major route through which pathogenic strains of the bacterium cause disease. Cells are able to survive outside the body for a limited amount of time, which makes them ideal indicator organisms to test environmental samples for fecal contamination.

One such E. coli strain, Escherichia coli O104:H4, has been the subject of a bacterial outbreak that began in Germany in May 2011. The outbreak started when several people in Germany (Died 48 June 2011) were infected with enterohemorrhagic E. coli (EHEC) bacteria, leading to hemolytic-uremic syndrome (HUS), a medical emergency that requires urgent treatment.]



Researchers found harmful E. coli, responsible for a number of deaths in Germany in June on one in six hands during the experiment and subsequently on the participants mobile phones.

Nearly all of them claimed to have washed their hands with soap after visiting the loo.

'This study provides more evidence that some people still don't wash their hands properly, especially after going to the toilet,' says Dr Val Curtis, of the [London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine](http://www.lshtm.ac.uk).

'I hope that the thought of having E. coli on their hands and phones encourages them to take more care in the bathroom,' she says. 'Washing your hands with soap is such a simple thing to do but there is no doubt it saves lives.'

In total, 390 samples were taken from hands and phones in 12 British cities during the study, published for [Global Handwashing Day](#) tomorrow.

The most contaminated phones were found in Birmingham, but it was **Londoners** who were caught with the highest proportion of E. coli on their hands.