

YOUR BODY, YOUR HEALTH

What You Can—and Can't—Catch in Public Places

You can't catch AIDS from a toilet seat—or in any public facility, for that matter. But you can catch warts in tanning salons and a host of additional infections in public places. The reason: Bacteria, viruses and other germs are everywhere, and given the right circumstances, usually poor hygiene, they can pose a risk to you. Your best protection is to avoid any place that isn't clean and to take special precautions in places that are prone to special problems:

• **Public restrooms:** The major risk is of pubic lice, also called crabs, which cause itching and red sores at the base of hair follicles. There's also a danger of diarrhea and hepatitis from bacteria and viruses that can survive on bathroom surfaces, including soap dispensers and towels.

Precautions: Squat, don't sit, or cover the toilet seat. Wash your hands afterward with soap and hot water and dry thoroughly. Air driers are the most sanitary, but if paper or cloth is the only option, use a clean, dry section.

• **Hot tubs, swimming pools and whirlpools:** Their increasing popularity in health clubs, hotels and resorts is bringing a corresponding increase in ear and skin infections. That's no surprise, as fungus and bacteria flourish in these kinds of warm, wet environments.

One of the most troublesome infections is pseudomonas folliculitis, an itchy, blistered rash that appears a day or two after contact with contaminated water. Some people experience fatigue, headache, fever and swollen

glands as well.

Sitting for prolonged periods neck deep in very warm water can also worsen a urinary-tract infection. While chlorine is a water purifier, high levels can cause a yeast infection by killing off normal protective bacteria that guard against infection.

Precautions: Remove wet swimsuits and shower immediately after soaking. Patronize only clean, well-run establishments.

• **Health clubs and locker rooms:** These areas are well-known sources of ath-

with bacteria. The greatest risks are mascara brushes, which can spread conjunctivitis, and lipstick tubes, which can harbor bacteria and herpes cold-sore viruses.

Improperly sterilized instruments for ear piercing can lead to ear-lobe infections and even hepatitis.

Precautions: Test cosmetic samples on the back of your hand. And consider having ear piercing done by a physician.

• **Hair and nail salons:** Even small abrasions or punctures in the skin with unclean equipment can cause staph or fungal infections. On the fingers and toes, these infections may resemble ingrown nails with redness, swelling and pain around the base and edge

of the nails.

Precautions: Look to see that equipment is sterilized adequately between customers. If you accidentally suffer a small wound, wash it with soap and water and apply an antibiotic ointment.

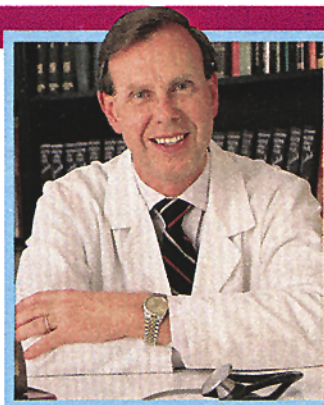
• **Restaurants and salad bars:** The cook doesn't wash his hands after using the restroom; meat is improperly

cooked; a salad sits out for hours—there are many ways to get sick in a restaurant. Abdominal cramps with fever, vomiting and diarrhea usually begin six or more hours after eating.

Precautions: Spoiled food doesn't always look, smell or taste bad, so going only to restaurants where cleanliness seems to count is your best defense. Beware of rare meats and soft-cooked eggs, which may harbor salmonella, and raw fish at sushi bars, a source of roundworms or tapeworms. At buffets and salad bars, avoid foods that seem to have been sitting for hours; remember that hot foods should be hot and cold foods cold.

• **Kennels and pet stores:** Puppies and kittens are frequently infested with roundworms. In playing with or holding the animal, it's possible for either adults or children to get the eggs on their hands and later transfer them to their mouths.

Precautions: Wash hands thoroughly after handling newborn animals. If you bring a pet home, a trip to the vet to check for worm infestation and general health should be an early priority. Use gloves when changing cat-litter boxes. **WD**



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Public restrooms aren't as germ-filled as you may fear, but you're still wise to take some precautions.

lete's foot and other common fungal infections. The earliest symptoms are usually redness, itching and drainage between the toes. Community towels also can harbor cold and flu viruses and the bacteria that cause contagious infections such as conjunctivitis and impetigo.

Precautions: Wear rubber pool shoes or thongs. If clean towels aren't available, bring your own. Dry between your toes after showering and then apply an antifungal powder to your feet.

• **Cosmetic and jewelry counters:** A recent survey by the Food and Drug Administration showed that 5 percent of shared cosmetics samples were contaminated

A QUICK WORD ON CATCHING AIDS

Despite what many people think and fear, AIDS is a very difficult disease to catch. For one thing, fairly large amounts of the virus that causes the problem must enter the body. For another, the virus will not live outside the body, even for small periods of time, except under strict laboratory conditions. So you needn't be concerned about catching AIDS in any other way than by intimate sexual contact with an infected person or by contact with contaminated blood products and needles.