Get a Grip! Shopping Cart Handles Are a Bacterial Playground

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As you roll your grocery cart through the produce section, down the canned food isles and over to the bakery, you may be picking up more than the weekly specials—shopping cart handles can host all sorts of disease-causing bacteria, according to findings from a University of Arizona (UA) study reported by MSNBC.

For the study, UA researchers swabbed shopping cart handles in four states. Of the 85 carts analyzed, a whopping 72 percent showed a marker for fecal bacteria. What's more, after scientists further examined 36 of the carts, they found E. coli and other kinds of bacteria on 50 percent of them.

"That's more than you find in a supermarket's restroom," said Charles Gerba, BS, PhD, a UA professor of microbiology and lead study researcher.

How is this possible? "That's because they use disinfecting cleaners in the restrooms. Nobody routinely cleans and disinfects shopping carts."

These study results helped explain earlier research that found kids who rode in shopping carts were more likely than others to develop bacterial infections. But there's no need to panic, said Neil Fishman, MD, an infectious disease expert and director of health care epidemiology and infection prevention at the University of Pennsylvania Health System.

Fishman isn't concerned because, despite years of routine consumer shopping cart use, there's been no evidence of disease outbreaks related to these convenient food carriers. "My guess is that there is more bacteria on a car seat than on a shopping cart," Fishman said.

Also, amping up your defense against germs is an easy process. Just wash your hands regularly (or use disinfecting wipes) and ask family members to do the same.

Oh, and just to be on the safe side, wipe down your shopping cart handle with a disinfectant.

Click here to find out how to protect yourself from E. coli in your food.

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