



Germ in Public Places Haunt Consumers

By Kim Rahn
Staff Reporter

Handles on shopping carts are the most contaminated by bacteria among widely used items at public facilities, according to a report on Monday.

Subway hand straps and Internet cafe mice are also found to have staphylococcus aureus, a spherical bacterium which can cause different diseases if people get infected with it through the skin.

The Korea Consumer Protection Board released the report after conducting an examination about bacteria contamination on 120 items at public facilities which people commonly touch with their hands in Seoul and nearby cities.

The examined items are: 20 hand straps on subway trains, 20 hand straps on buses, 20 toilet doorknobs at four department stores, 20 elevator buttons at four department stores, 20 handles of shopping carts at four discount stores, and 20 mice at four Internet cafes.

Among the 120 samples, 95 percent, or 114 samples were detected to have from 7 to 17,000 colony forming unit (CFU) of bacteria per 10 square centimeters. The bacteria include all kinds of bacteria including pathogenic ones.

Shopping cart handles had the most bacteria with an average 1,100 CFU, followed by mice with an average 690 CFU, and hand straps of buses with 380 CFU.

Toilet doorknobs were contaminated with an average 340 CFU of bacteria, elevator buttons with 130 CFU, and hand straps on subways with 86 CFU.





"The larger the units are, the more the facilities are contaminated by microorganisms. Such facilities have a greater chance of having pathogenic microorganisms," Chung Yun-hee, staff of the consumer protection board's research team, said.

Also, the report said they found 3 to 47 CFU of staphylococcus aureus per 10 square centimeters at 5.8 percent of the total samples, or seven, including subway hand straps, toilet doorknobs, elevator buttons and computer mice.

If people are infected with staphylococcus aureus through cuts on the skin, they can develop various diseases such as purulent inflammation and food poisoning. It can also contaminate food.

"People can get infectious diseases from their hands after using public facilities contaminated with bacteria," Chung said.

She advised people to wash their hands with soap because keeping hands clean can prevent about 70 percent of infectious diseases. The World Health Organization also recommends people to wash hands for disease prevention.

Bacteria	
(Unit: Colony forming unit)	
	Shopping cart handle 1,100
	Mouse at Internet cafes 690
	Hand strap on buses 380
	Toilet doorknob 340

Source: Korea Consumer Protection Board

The board conducted a simulation on removing microorganisms by washing hands.

``Washing hands in running water without soap removes only a small amount of bacteria. Hands washed with soap decreased the microorganism from 3,500 CFU to 8 CFU," Chung said.

She pointed out that more than 77 percent of people are aware of the importance of washing hands, but only 47.9 percent actually wash their hands.

``The facility management should regularly clean public facilities. And people should develop a habit of washing their hands after using the facilities, especially before eating," she said.

rahnita@koreatimes.co.kr

02-13-2006 17:06

[About the Times](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Terms of Service](#) | [Subscription](#) | [Media Kit](#)
Copyright© KoreaTimes.co.kr All rights reserved. E-mail to [webmaster](#)