

How Clean Are Your New Clothes? Find Out

Thursday, January 07, 2010

'GMA' Found Harmful Bacteria on Brand New Clothes

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When you [buy new clothes](#), you expect them to be new, not already worn by someone else. But that's not always the case. Consider what happens after you return a pair of pants or a blouse. Often it goes right back on the rack, to be resold instead of staying in the back room, retail experts told "[Good Morning America](#)."

"The customer probably gets the wool pulled over their eyes. & A lot of people just come home and if it has a tag attached, they think it's brand new and they wear it," Tori Patrick, a former retail saleswoman, said. "You really never know where it's been."

To see how clean some "new" clothes were, "GMA" bought everything from blouses to pants to underwear from three popular chain clothing stores ranging from high- to low-end and handed them over to Dr. Philip Tierno, director of microbiology and immunology at New York University, to test the 14 items for germs.

Tierno found disturbing results. There was flora, or bacteria, on several items.

"On this black and tan blouse we found representation of respiratory secretions, skin flora, and some fecal flora," Tierno said.

On a jacket, Tierno discovered evidence of feces, skin flora and respiratory secretions, especially in the armpit and "close to the buttocks," Tierno said.

The biggest surprise came when Tierno tested a silk blouse. There, he said, he found vaginal organisms, yeast and more fecal germs. Tierno said a couple of the items had extremely high counts of germs, far above normal.

"Some garments were grossly contaminated with many organisms & indicating that either many people tried it or ... someone tried it on with heavy contamination," he said. "In a sense, you are touching somebody's arm pit or groin. So you want to be protected that's all."

"You may not come down with anything and, most cases you don't, but it's potentially possible," he added.

Wash or Dry New Clothes

The organisms can survive weeks or even months on clothes, Tierno said. Contracting a yeast infection this way is highly unlikely, though possible, experts say. And with the evidence of feces, viruses could also be passed along.

"A very bad type of diarrhea -- you can also transmit things like the norovirus, stomach virus. You can transmit things like MRSA [a staph bacteria]," Tierno said.

"Most people are unaware and think that they can't really catch anything from these clothes because they are dry, they are on the rack and they are new. They are not realizing that numerous individuals try them on and contact certain parts of their body that may transmit potential pathogens."

In order to protect yourself from harmful bacteria, Tierno recommended washing your new clothes or running them through one cycle in a hot dryer before wearing them. He also suggested wearing clothes underneath while trying on new clothes and washing your hands after shopping.

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