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search 

[home](#) [our services](#) [health advice](#) [latest offers](#) [your local pharmacy](#) [about us](#)

[news](#) [our brand](#) [The Co-operative difference](#) [job opportunities](#)

you are here:

[become a member](#)

[contact us](#)

[find us](#)

[home](#) [About the Co-operative Pharmacy](#) [The Co-operative Pharmacy news](#) [Mobile phone hygiene risk to millions of people in the UK](#)

Mobile phone hygiene risk to millions of people in the UK

August 16, 2010

New technology, from smart and mobile phones to laptops, could be spreading illnesses and potentially killer diseases because of poor hand hygiene, according to research released today (16 August 2010) by [The Co-operative Pharmacy](#).

Each year, more than 750 people die and almost one million people¹ are ill with bugs which can be passed on or contracted by not washing hands.

As part of its ethical strategy, The Co-operative Pharmacy commissioned the study by ICM² into hand hygiene, which revealed that one in three people use a mobile phone or BlackBerry when on the toilet while one in twenty people also surf on a laptop.

Almost one in three people admitted to not using soap or handwash and one in five people don't always wash their hands after being on the loo.

Mobile and smart phones³ have been shown to be dirty and have high levels of bacteria, which indicate poor personal hygiene, and act as a breeding ground for other bugs.

The research by The Co-operative Pharmacy also found that one in ten people said they never or only sometimes washed their hands while people admitted to reading a newspaper or magazine (48 per cent), cleaning their teeth, drinking and eating when on the toilet.

John Nuttall, Managing Director of The Co-operative Pharmacy, said: "As a leading community pharmacy we believe it is vital to make people aware of the importance of good hand hygiene when visiting the toilet.

"In the UK, the new trend of using smart and mobile phones in addition to laptops on the toilet is inadvertently raising the risk of the spread of infections, which affect hundreds of thousands of people. The symptoms are very unpleasant for most people and, in some circumstances, can be fatal."

Dr. Paul Cleary, Epidemiologist, Health Protection Agency, said: "Hand-washing is important at all times, but particularly after going to the toilet, before and after preparing food and before eating.

"Thorough handwashing with soap and water is the best protection against C diff and viral infections, such as the common cold, flu and norovirus. It also reduces the chances of cross-contamination when preparing food and therefore affords some protection against food-borne infections, such as salmonella and campylobacter."

As well as championing good hand hygiene among local communities, The Co-operative Pharmacy is also working with UNICEF to boost cleanliness and sanitation standards in the developing world and has pledged £300,000 to support a community project in Togo. It will help to build 6,000 toilets in 300 villages, to improve the health of an estimated 110,000 children and their families.

John Nuttall added: "In developing countries, diseases spread by poor hand hygiene and inadequate sanitation are far more common and deadly and cholera, dysentery and diarrhoea kill 4,000 children each day. In Togo diarrhoea causes a third of all deaths among children under the age of five."

Customers can support UNICEF's work by making a donation at any branch of The Co-operative Pharmacy nationwide.

To find your nearest branch visit: www.co-operative.coop/pharmacy

Additional Information

1. According to the NHS 850,000 people a year are ill with food poisoning which is also attributed to 500 deaths each year (<http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/food-poisoning/Pages/Introduction.aspx>).

The Health Protection Agency infection outbreak reports that around 52,000 a year are ill with gastrointestinal infections (<http://www.hpa.org.uk/hpr/archives/infections/2010/enteric10.htm>) and 40,000 people suffer with C Diff in primary care organisations and hospitals (http://www.hpa.org.uk/web/HPAweb&HPAwebStandard/HPAweb_C/1254510678961) while the National Office for Statistics reported 163 C diff related deaths in 2009 (<http://www.nisra.gov.uk/demography/default.asp29.htm>)

2. The survey questioned 2018 people and found that on the toilet:

- 48 per cent of people read a newspaper or magazine
- 32 per cent used a mobile phone or Blackberry
- 8 per cent cleaned their teeth
- 8 per cent drank or ate
- 4 per cent surfed on a laptop

When soap and handwash is available, people were surveyed on how often they use it:

- 72 per cent said always
- 9 per cent said that they sometimes, occasionally or never washed.

3. In the UK there are more than 75 million mobile phones. A survey by Which? found that one in four mobile phones had excessively high levels of bacteria <http://www.which.co.uk/news/2010/07/how-clean-is-your-mobile-phone-221545>

About the UNICEF sanitation project:

According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper for Togo, published for the period 2009-2011, 68% of families do not have access to or do not use latrines.

In order to promote basic sanitation and reduce water-borne diseases in Togo, the UNICEF project, supported by The Co-operative Pharmacy, will introduce the Community Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) approach, encouraging communities and schools to examine their own state in terms of hygiene and sanitation, their practices in terms of defecation and management of their school environment.

The approach is designed to mobilise communities into reaching and maintaining an 'open defecation free' status in 300 villages in the Savanes, Kara and Maritime regions of Togo.

About UNICEF

UNICEF is the world's leading organisation working for children and their rights in more than 190 countries. As champion of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, UNICEF works to help every child realise their full potential.

Together with our partners, UNICEF delivers health care, nutrition, education and protection to children in urgent need, while working with governments to

ensure they deliver on their promise to protect and promote the rights of every child.

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About The Co-operative

Part of The Co-operative Group – the world's largest consumer co-operative – The Co-operative Pharmacy is the UK's third largest pharmacy retail chain with nearly 800 branches.

The Co-operative Group stands apart from other major retailers in the UK as a business which is owned, not by a small group of shareholders, but by more than five million consumers. With core interests in food, financial services, travel, pharmacy, funerals and farms, it has an annual turnover of £14 billion, employs 123,000 staff and operates over 5,000 retail trading outlets handling more than 20 million weekly transactions.

Following the acquisition of the Somerfield supermarket chain in March 2009, The Co-operative Food is the fifth largest food retailer. The Co-operative Financial Services is one of the largest and most diversified financial mutual businesses, operating The Co-operative Bank, The Co-operative Insurance and Britannia.

The Co-operative is the UK's number one provider of funeral services, the third largest retail pharmacy chain, a leading travel retailer, supplying the travel needs of more than three million people annually, and is the UK's largest farmer.

Among its other businesses are The Co-operative Motor Group, The Co-operative Electrical and The Co-operative Legal Services.

For further information contact:

The Co-operative Group

Alexandra Anderson
Senior Public Relations Officer
Tel: 0161 266 3416
Email: Alexandra.Anderson@co-operative.coop

Craig Noonan
PR Manager
Tel: 0161 266 3589 or 07702 505439
Email: Craig.Noonan@co-operative.coop

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