

# Think Monkey Poop

Until recently, I stopped shaking hands. My theory is that shaking hands of people with colds or the flu makes me sick, like they're passing on an invisible . . . *whatever* that causes illness. There might be something to this theory – but for now, it's only the germ of an idea. What's more, there seems to be a **lot** of sick people in my office – it's like they're coming in *on purpose* . . .

The eleven year old son of a patient recently asked me how **I** keep from getting sick. I told him "I just imagine I've been cleaning up monkey poop all day. When I think of my hands as being all dirty, I don't touch my face." The secret to not catching swine flu, or colds, or stomach flu, or other contagious diseases when I'm around them all day is **Visualizing Monkey Poop All Over My Hands**, and to **sanitize my hands** before touching my face. Germs mostly enter the body through the nose, mouth or corner of the eye. Think of your face as the target for the germs – don't give them a free ride there on your hands.

Alcohol based gel and foam sanitizers are **more effective than washing** with soap and water (as long as there's not visible gunk – or monkey poop – on them). Benzalkonium chloride makes them even *better* (and prevents drying like alcohol-based products, which can cause skin cracking, giving the germs a place to hide). They're available in pocket sized dispensers: just squirt them on your hands, and rub until dry, or for at *least* about 15 seconds. Pay attention to your fingertips when doing this and you'll kill almost **all** contagious germs.

For most of history, contagious diseases were one of the biggest killers on the planet. Remember Albrecht Dürer's painting, **Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse**, used to illustrate Revelation 6:1-8? It showed Death, Famine, War and Plague (or Pestilence). The Black Death (probably bubonic plague) killed about a quarter to a half the population of the known world at that time (Europe, Asia and Africa). Now, curing bubonic plague is easy with cheap, common and easy to find antibiotics.

While antibiotics have given us a *temporary* advantage over some *bacteria*, they don't kill viruses. A few viruses *can* be treated; herpes simplex / zoster using Zovirax, Valtrex, etc; some influenza viruses with Tamiflu, Relenza, amantadine, etc.; rhinovirus (which causes the common cold) with pleconaril, etc. (Pleconaril is still in trials, tho' – don't look for it quite yet).

Antibiotics have been around for less than a century, but their usefulness seems to be nearing the end of the line.

Germs continue developing resistance, and there's not much in the pipeline. Worse, humans are **helping** bacteria become resistant.



**FOUR HORSEMEN OF THE APOCALYPSE**  
by Albrecht Dürer (*Plague / Pestilence is on the right*)

Antibiotics often kill bacteria – that's why they're used. But bacteria evolve quickly, since their life cycle is measured in hours, not decades. When we take an antibiotic, it may kill most of the bacteria we're targeting, but some may not be as susceptible. They reproduce, creating more resistant bacteria. That's why it's important to take *all* the antibiotics you've been prescribed – if you stop early, the remaining bacteria are relatively resistant. Taking antibiotics is like sending bacteria to school.

Luckily, you don't need antibiotics as often as you may think. Studies show most healthy adults don't need antibiotics for many common conditions, like upper respiratory infections. A healthy person with a chest cold (we're not talking about pneumonia) is likely to do as well *without* antibiotics as with them.

Remember, I said *healthy*. If you're a smoker, or asthmatic (that is, if you wheeze when you get a chest cold), or diabetic, or have emphysema, immune problems, or other health problems, you *may* benefit, depending on what your doctor finds. But if you go to your doctor with a typical respiratory infection – that is, a sore throat, sinus congestion or cough, etc., ask if it's *safe* for you to try getting better for a few days *without* antibiotics. By doing so, you can win: your immune system gets better at beating that particular bug; you don't develop a population of resistant germs; and you don't face the unintended consequences of possible side effects. Not only that, it's cheaper (save your money for gas).

Note that we've been talking about respiratory infections. That's because they kill far more people than any other kind of contagious disease, including such biggies as AIDS, malaria, typhoid, MRSA, tetanus or hepatitis. Many respiratory infections, like colds (which often develop into bronchitis if you take something like Sudafed, Dayquil or another cold or cough medicine that can dry you out) are spread by **contact**. If you avoid contact, you don't get sick.

Picture this. An H1N1 swine flu patient (who doesn't know she has it yet) coughs, politely covering her mouth, and then finishes pumping her gas, leaving a little mucus and swine flu germs on the handle. You come along a minute later and use that same pump. Your hands are now carrying enough swine flu germs to make you sick.

You then decide to eat a stick of gum, or rub your eye, or wipe your nose. At that point, you may either:

*A: Think of your hands as covered in Monkey Poop, squirt on some sanitizer, kill the flu viruses, eat the gum / touch your face, and live happily after, or*  
*2: Skip the hand sanitizer. Thousands of swine flu viruses cheer as they make it to their goal. A few days later, for no reason you can imagine, you get sick.*

Your call.

*If you like this column, read my new book Blood, Sweat & 2<sup>nd</sup> Gear. Available (autographed) at the front desk or from <http://snipurl.com/fgmd2>.*

*We sometimes have **non-drying** hand sanitizers for sale at the front desk, too.*

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