

In Flight, Eat the Rubber Chicken on the Toilet



By Josh Bloom — September 9, 2015



There is a rather silly piece in [Wednesday's Washington](#)

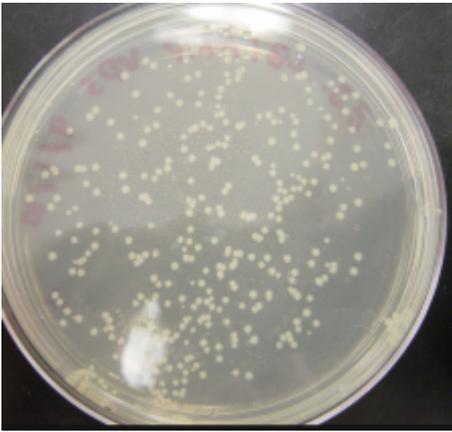
[Post](#) [1] about the dirtiest place on an airplane. You already know, simply because it's too obvious otherwise, that it *won't* be the bathroom. There have been plenty of stories of this type over the years, and rather than being helpful, they are usually nothing more than a titillating headline to get you to read the thing.

Instead of "the butler did it," it's "the answer is, *never* the bathroom."

This [was shown](#) [2] in 2007 by a 13-year old boy, who did a simple, but clever science project. Kycleray Katherman compared the amount of bacteria found in the school water fountains, and in the toilet. The latter was cleaner. I'm not sure what to do with that information. Maybe your dog has been right all along.

The Post piece examined selected locations on an airplane and how many bacteria types and amount that were found. The butler didn't do it.

By far, the "dirtiest" place on a plane was the tray table. Here are the numbers from the article, which were measured in colony forming units (CFUs) per square inch. (A colony forming unit is an approximation of the number of pathogens, either in a Petri dish or cultured cells. There are different methods for counting the CFUs.)



Tray table 2,155 CFU/sq. in.

2. Drinking fountain buttons 1,240 CFU/sq. in.
3. Overhead air vent 285 CFU/sq. in.
4. Lavatory flush button 265 CFU/sq. in.
5. Seatbelt buckle 230 CFU/sq. in.
6. Bathroom stall locks 70 CFU/sq. in.

Taken at face value, the data suggest that you would be better off having your meal (which itself is probably far more dangerous than anything else on the plane) while sitting on the toilet.

For those of you who may take this literally, don't get too comfortable. It's bunch of nonsense.

Why? Because it makes *no* sense: "Thankfully, all the samples were *negative for fecal coliforms like E. coli*, which can make people fatally ill."

Red flag!!! *E. coli* bacteria are found *everywhere*. In [hotel rooms](#) [3], it's 81 percent of surfaces, including TV remote controls, walls, door handles, lamps, you name it. Bed spreads? You don't want to know, or you'd probably overreact before going near the bed.



Yet, none of it was found in an airplane bathroom? They must be kidding. This alone is reason enough to *dump* this whole study (apologies) into the toilet (or onto the tray table). There is clearly a sampling error or measurement error, or both.

In other words, forget it. The whole thing is a *waste*.

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Links

[1] <http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonkblog/wp/2015/09/08/the-dirtiest-places-on-an-airplane-ranked/>

[2] <http://abcnews.go.com/GMA/story?id=3293080>

[3] <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/health/2012/06/17/fecal-matter-hiding-in-hotel-rooms/>