

A January Sales Shopping Spree or a Bacteria Buffet? Research Reveals Hidden Germs in Retail Hot Spots

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New swabbing research by [Initial Washroom Hygiene](#) has found that in-person January sales shopping could be exposing Brits to high levels of microbial contamination (germs).

Replicating the journey of a typical shopper's tour around some of central London's most popular retail stores, 'high contact surfaces' such as escalator handrails and lift buttons were tested to reveal the level of biological life on them. Many returned readings that were well above the range that hygiene experts would consider normal** for biological contamination on an object or surface.

The swabbing results were gathered using ATP* swabs and an ATP bioluminescence reader to measure biological activity not visible to the eye.

The results of this snapshot swabbing research showed:

- Nearly half (47%) of all the lift buttons and escalator handrails swabbed recorded a reading of more than 500 units, indicating a high level of contamination.
- Lift buttons and escalator handrails in three of the stores visited had readings exceeding 1,000 units, showing an extremely high level of biological contamination. One lift recorded a staggering 1,350 units.
- Shops predominantly selling clothes averaged a reading of 533 units on their lift buttons and escalator handrails, whilst food shops and food departments registered an average of 612 units, a stark warning for anyone tucking into a post-shop snack.

- Traditional department stores fared no better, with a combined average reading of 598 for their lift buttons and escalator handrails, meaning shoppers face potential high exposure to biological contamination as soon as they venture away from the ground floor.
- Lift buttons (with an average reading of 614, but a high of 1,350) appear to retain slightly higher biological contamination levels than escalator handrails (average reading of 536, but a high of 1,353 units). Both consistently recorded readings over 500 units, which is considered a 'high level of contamination'.

Jamie Woodhall, UK Technical & Innovations Manager at Initial Washroom Hygiene, comments: "With seasonal illnesses such as the flu still circulating, it's vital people understand how to break the chain of infection when they are out making the most of the January sales.

"We wanted to mimic the journey of someone on a shopping day in central London to remind people that germs are the invisible danger lurking unseen on contaminated surfaces, which are potentially being touched by hundreds of people an hour.

"With 80% of infections being transmitted through hands, the power to curb infections is literally in our own hands. No one wants to catch a seasonal bug, so it's advisable to regularly wash and dry your hands using warm water and soap, fully covering your palms, the backs of your hands, between your fingers and under nails, followed by a thorough rinse. And always wash your hands after using the toilet, before preparing food or eating, or after coughing or sneezing."

Initial Washroom Hygiene recommends:

- The first line of defence in preventing the spread of illnesses is washing your hands thoroughly and often. Remember to use soap, wash for 20-30 seconds, thoroughly rinse and dry your hands with a warm air dryer or paper towel, especially after touching shared surfaces.
 - Use hand sanitiser when washing facilities aren't available. It is advisable to carry a small bottle of hand sanitiser with you at all times and always sanitise your hands before eating and after using the toilet.
 - Avoid touching your face, particularly your eyes, nose and mouth, particularly after coming into contact with public touchpoints. If you do need to touch your face, then make sure you wash your hands.
 - To help reduce the transmission of seasonal illnesses, cover your nose and mouth when you cough or sneeze, using a tissue or your elbow, NOT your hands (even when wearing gloves!), as you could contaminate surfaces you touch afterwards.
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- Germs can easily transfer from surfaces, touchpoints and shared items onto our hands. Regularly clean and disinfect surfaces or objects that are likely to be touched by multiple hands, such as door handles and rails, remote controls and light switches, to reduce the cross contamination risk.
 - Dispose of used tissues immediately (REMEMBER – Catch it, Bin it!)

**The ATP reading scale of objects used by our hygiene experts:	
> 500 units	(indicates a high level of biological contamination)
= 200-500 units	(is considered to be within a normal range)
< 200 units	(indicates a low level of biological contamination)

* ATP (adenosine triphosphate) is a molecule found in and around living cells.