

Letter to the Editor

[The Editor is not responsible for the views expressed by the correspondents]

Beyond The Breeze : Surprising Drawbacks of Hand Dryers

SIR, — Hand hygiene is an essential aspect of infection control in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU), and proper hand drying after washing is a crucial step in this process. Wet skin is more likely to transmit bacteria than dry skin, making adequate hand drying an essential part of hand hygiene¹. The Epic3: National Evidence-Based Guidelines for Preventing Healthcare-Associated Infections in NHS Hospitals in England emphasises the importance of completely dry hands for effective hand hygiene². A study found that hand drying reduced the translocation of bacteria by up to 99% compared to wet hands³. Clear recommendations exist for handwashing with soap and water, but less is known about the relative efficacy of hand-drying methods in reducing contamination⁴. In health care setups, Paper towels, cloth towels, and hot air dryers are commonly used to dry washed hands¹. Different methods of hand drying have varying levels of efficacy. In healthcare facilities across India, electric hand dryers are prevalent, mainly due to their affordability. However, these hand-drying devices have many disadvantages that need to be considered. Studies have revealed that hand dryers can contribute to the spreading of bacteria. These devices have been found to disperse bacteria up to a distance of 3 feet, which is a cause for concern¹. Additionally, jet air dryers, a more powerful version of hand dryers, can disperse bacteria even further, up to a distance of 2 meters.¹ They contaminate the clothing and the surrounding environment by dispersing the bacteria, thereby increasing the risk of cross-contamination and spreading to bystanders^{1,5}. Studies have shown that using a hand dryer after washing hands may lead to more bacteria on the hands than without using a hand dryer⁶. As found by many studies, paper towels are an effective alternative. However, various studies have found that good-quality paper towels dry hands efficiently, remove bacteria, and prevent

environmental contamination^{1,2}. Considering the current average cost per sterile paper towel to be around eight rupees, this might not be cost-effective in resource-limited settings. It is imperative that we reconsider the use of hand dryers and explore alternative measures that are both cost-effective and efficient.

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Subbaiah Institute of Medical Sciences, Shimoga, Karnataka 577222

Darshan Rajatadri Rangaswamy¹,
Niranjan Kamble²,
Kiran Kavatagi³

¹MBBS, MD, DNB, Assistant Professor, Department of Pediatrics

²MD, Associate Professor, Department of Pediatrics

³MD, Associate Professor, Department of Microbiology