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Paper towels are cleanest to dry hands

Tom Whipple Science Editor

Dyson hand dryers may have the virtue, surprisingly rare in the hand dryer market, of actually drying your hands, but could their ability to disperse water efficiently also mean inadvertently dispersing infection?

A study of different methods of hand drying has found that if a hand dryer is powerful enough to dry, it is also powerful enough to contaminate.

Using a paper towel meant that any microbes not removed by washing found their way straight into the bin, but using a Dyson Airblade scattered them far and wide.

Scientists at the University of Westminster investigated four different hand drying methods: paper towels, roller towels, normal warm air dryers, and Dyson Airblades.

People dipped gloved hands into a suspension of yeast and then dried them. While they did so, plates of agar were placed at different distances from the drying to see how much yeast ended up growing on them.

With the Dyson, the agar plate that was placed 20cm away recorded 67 separate colonies of yeast, and an average of 11 at 1.5m away.

With the paper towels, seven were recorded 20cm away, and none at 1.5m away.

The results of the experiment were published in the *Journal of Hospital Infection*.

The research, paid for by hand towel manufacturers, is the latest attack in a continuing battle between the industry and Dyson.

Dyson has responded to similar accusations in the past by pointing out that its dryers produce two thirds less CO₂ than paper towels, and also that they filter the air as they dry and so potentially actually make bathrooms cleaner.