**Paper Toilet Seat Covers:** Do They Actually Protect from Germs?

Makayla McKibben

DSC500 T301

06.13.2024

Presuming that providing a barrier between yourself and a toilet seat may reduce transmission of bacterial and viral infections is popular enough that many businesses, schools, and other public access restrooms provide them in every stall. These paper toilet seat covers are ubiquitous, with more market growth on the horizon (MMR, 2023). The use of toilet seat covers gained popularity in the 1930s and has only increased since then (Seomavericks, 2022). Current projections show that the market may grow by 5.1% from 2023 to 2029 (MMR, 2023). However, when reading published articles and completing a quick internet search, it is evident that the research does not support the veracity of the idea that porous paper seat liners reduce the spread of infections (Heid, 2018). "In terms of preventing illness and transmission of infectious disease, there's no real evidence that toilet-seat covers do that." says Dr. William Schaffner, a professor of preventive medicine at Vanderbilt University School of Medicine" (as cited in Heid, 2018).

Approaching this "fact" with caution is warranted, as websites on Google's front page currently contradict Dr. Schaffner (Kleven, 2024). The website for Direct Textile Store states the benefits of toilet seat covers, "Hygiene: Toilet seats can harbor bacteria, viruses, and other pathogens, posing a risk of infection or illness transmission. By placing a toilet seat cover on the seat before use, individuals can create a protective barrier that lessens contact with contaminated surfaces and minimizing the risk of exposure to harmful germs." (Kleven, 2024). To approach this question academically and provide the structure and outline for a scientific fact-finding mission, we can ask the following questions:

* How dirty are toilet seats?
* Can sickness or disease be passed via contact with a toilet seat?
* What disease-causing microbes are present on a toilet seat?
* How often are public toilet seats cleaned?
* What is the most effective cleaners for toilet seats?
* How many people use paper toilet seat covers?
* How many businesses offer paper toilet seat covers?

Asking about how unclean toilet seats are is the basis for determining whether this topic is even essential. If the toilet seats are not dirty, then there's no need to worry about toilet seat cover use. Assuming our data shows that toilet seats are contaminated, we need to know if the bacteria or viruses pose any risk. Common sense and some quick search results say that unless you have open wounds on your body touching the contaminated area or expose a mucous membrane to the bacteria or viruses directly, there should be no risk of infection. We may also need to find out how often people are cleaning toilet seats and with what chemicals; this will factor into our risk assessment.

The last two questions focus on the applicability of our results to the general public. If only five percent of people use toilet seat covers, our study produces minimal benefit as it only applies to a small subset of the population. Businesses providing toilet seat covers seem to be more common than not, which may indicate there is more demand for them than is logical.

References

Heid, M. (2018, March 7). *Should I use a toilet seat cover?*. Time. <https://time.com/5182826/how-to-use-a-toilet-seat-cover/>

Kelsi Kleven (Ed.). (2024, May 30). *Benefits of toilet seat covers*. RSS. <https://directtextilestore.com/blog/how-to-use-toilet-seat-covers-a-guide-to-hygiene-and-comfort>

MAXIMIZE MARKET RESEARCH. (2023, July 21). *Disposable toilet seat covers market: Global Industry Analysis and forecast (2023-2029) by product type, material type, layer, application, and region*. MAXIMIZE MARKET RESEARCH. <https://www.maximizemarketresearch.com/market-report/global-disposable-toilet-seat-covers-market/108929/>

Seomavericks. (2022, June 4). *Are Toilet seat covers effective*. Crown Products. <https://crownproductsonline.com/are-toilet-seat-covers-effective/#:~:text=It’s%20unlikely%20that%20individuals%20will,inherent%20in%20toilet%20seat%20covers>.