

Showerheads Grow Bacteria

Carl Brahe [Inspection Perfection inc](#)

A recent [study by researchers at CU](#) found that a biofilm accumulates inside showerheads that provides a healthy environment for bacteria to grow. The concentration can be 100 times higher in shower water than in the supply water. These bacteria are aerosolized when water begins to flow. The bacteria can be inhaled deep inside your lungs in this form.

According to CU researchers: "We conclude that showerheads may present a significant potential exposure to aerosolized microbes, including documented opportunistic pathogens."

[Researchers at National Jewish Hospital](#) believe that increases in pulmonary infections in the United States in recent decades from bacteria like *M. avium* may be linked to people taking more showers and fewer baths,

Showerheads were collected from various locations across the country. The biofilm that was accumulated inside was tested for DNA to determine what microorganism existed. Non-tuberculous mycobacteria such as *Mycobacterium avium* (MAC), and other microorganisms were found growing in 30% of showerheads from various location in Denver, Chicago and New York City.

Wikipedia: "MAC bacteria are common in the environment and cause [infection](#) when inhaled or swallowed. Symptoms of MAC diseases are reminiscent of [tuberculosis](#). They include fever, fatigue, and weight loss. Many patients will have [anemia](#) and [neutropenia](#) if bone marrow is involved. Pulmonary involvement is similar to TB, while diarrhea and abdominal pain are associated with gastrointestinal involvement. MAC should always be considered in a person with HIV infection presenting with diarrhea."

In children swollen lymph nodes in the neck are common and is usually treated with surgical removal. Other reported symptoms of pulmonary disease caused by *M. avium* can include fatigue, persistent cough, dry cough, shortness of breath and weakness. A general run down state may occur.

For most people, short term exposure seems to pose no risk, but the effects of long term exposure are unknown. For people with compromised immune function it can be dangerous, although researchers say that potential risks to people with compromised immune systems such as people with AIDS, flu, cancer, emphysema or other health problems, must be studied further. Pregnant women and children have a higher risk of developing health problems related to Non-tuberculous mycobacteria.

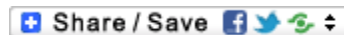
[Aaron E. Glatt, MD](#), a spokesman for the Infectious Diseases Society of America, says: "Mycobacterium avium, and the other non-tuberculous mycobacteria, are ubiquitous. For healthy people, they don't represent a significant pathogen." For the immunocompromised they are more of a concern.

Earlier studies indicate that these organisms grow better in chlorinated water than in untreated well water. The microbes appear to be chlorine resistant and cleaning with chlorine bleach actually increases growth.

Anti-bacterial cleaners also appear to antagonize the problem. A study found that in spite of [antibacterial cleaners](#) now being common household items the spread of disease is not appreciably reduced. In fact, there are now issues of bacterial resistance to contend with. These cleaners are not recommended.

Dismantling and soaking the parts in hot, white vinegar may be effective in cleaning metal showerheads. Heat the vinegar in a pan on the stove. Do not boil. Do not soak rubber parts. Soak parts for 20 minutes then wash and rinse thoroughly before reassembling.

Researchers recommend replacing showerheads every six months, or when mineral build-up begins to collect. Metal showerheads are preferred. Plastic appears to accumulate biofilm quicker than metal. If you are concerned about possible dangers to your health, take baths instead of showers.



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