

Tip of the Month

A Bug's Life

Hey there, friend. Could you give a gal a lift?

I'm Flora, one of the not-so-normal germs that resides on Mrs. Smith's skin, gown and bed linen, and I need a ride. I relocated here a few weeks ago, but there's been a real population explosion since then and I'm ready for a change in location. This neighborhood has become way too crowded for an adventurous bug like me. That's how it is with us microbial types. *Here today. Clone tomorrow.*

Some of my friends have already moved to the waterfront. They say the livin' is easy on a sink and faucet handle. Others who didn't like being clustered so close together opted for the flatlands of Mrs. Smith's bedside stand and tray table. Plenty of wide open space there for pathogens to blend in, and for you to place your phlebotomy tray and supplies. We love it when you do.

Your phlebotomy tray is like a train that continually pulls in and out of different patient stations, transporting us to and fro, where we can load and unload at will. It gives us microorganisms an opportunity to really mix and mingle. But in order to be exposed to a host of new environments---and an environment of new hosts---we have to be at the right place at the right time. Speaking of hosts, Mrs. Smith doesn't look so good. But that's how it goes with healthcare-acquired infections.

A bug's life can be pretty tough, too. My viability is relatively short compared to yours. And I certainly don't intend to waste time. Cell death comes to us all. Why just the other day, an acquaintance of mine with an infectious personality, Rod, was prospering in a life of grime. Next thing you know, someone sanitized him. Poof, he's gone. Making it in this Bugdom requires more than a hardy attitude. It means keeping a low profile and becoming resistant to everyone and everything that wants to do you harm.

I guess what's bugging me now is the realization that my future is in your hands. Literally. I've seen it too many times. Those who consistently practice proper hand hygiene and infection control are bringing life as we germs know it to an end. You're interrupting our routes of transmission. Yet, some of us will manage to survive on the unwashed hands and contaminated gloves of harried healthcare workers who don't mind giving us a lift to their next destination. The next stop could be another patient, the lab, the cafeteria, or their home. The possibilities are endless. And for those who do practice hand hygiene, there's always the hope that we can stowaway under rings, artificial nails, or chipped nail polish. We've even been identified on tourniquets and in lotions employees have brought from home. So with your help, the adventures of a bug's life never have to end. We'll continue to divide and conquer.

So... what about that lift?