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MYTHBUSTING THE BATHROOM ONE STALL AT A TIME

By: Rika van Rooyen – Bidvest Steiner



If anyone is an expert in what we might call Bathroom Dynamics, it's the folks at Bidvest Steiner. This homegrown hygiene services provider has spent over half a century helping ensure that bathrooms at South Africa's leading public and private corporations sparkle and has collected quite a bit of information along the way. Ever wondered if the first toilet stall really is the one to avoid? Or if women's bathrooms are cleaner than men's? Read on as Bidvest Steiner's Rika van Rooyen reveals what you've always wanted to know about humankind's most visited public amenity...

Use the first stall

The first toilet stall sees less traffic presumably because it's usually near the washroom entrance and most people want privacy so they'll choose a stall further down the line. Conversely, most of us also believe that the rest of us are lazy and will always choose the easiest option, hence that's the one to avoid because it's perceived

as a 'high traffic' stall. *"That we should be using the first stall is borne out by a study of 51 public restrooms, quoted on CNN.com, which found that the stall closest to the door has the lowest bacteria levels,"* says Ms Van Rooyen. Of course, now that everyone knows this, should we still be choosing the first stall....?

Don't place belongings on the floor

When bathrooms are correctly serviced they should have their floors transformed into sparkling oases of cleanliness several times during a typical working day. *"It's precisely because the floor is most prone to becoming the dirtiest area of a public bathroom that there should be such a heavy emphasis on it,"* explains Ms Van Rooyen. She adds that it really is unnecessary to use a paper seat cover, or to tear off pieces of toilet paper, to create a barrier between the skin and the toilet seat. *"The toilet seat is actually the cleanest part of the bathroom because its most obvious and gets the most attention,"* she says.

A good idea is to hang handbags, or light parcels, either around one's arm or on the door handle. A study quoted by CNN found that one-third of women's purses had faecal bacteria on the bottom.

Women win the 'Battle of the Sexes'

As far as bathrooms go, the 'Battle of the Sexes' was won long ago by the fairer sex. MizPee, whose 300 000 users worldwide rate toilets on a scale from one to five and nominate the globe's best and worst toilets, says that women tend to have higher standards for bathroom cleanliness than men. *"Our users often rate any given unisex bathroom lower than men,"* said founder Dhana Pawar.

It is hugely important to wash your hands – properly

Bathroom fixtures, fittings and consumables really do carry a lot of bacteria, with door knobs, taps and being amongst the worst offenders. It's common cause that unwashed hands would have handled everything from the door knob to the door lock to the flusher. Be alert if you touch one of these objects to not rub your eye, nose or mouth, as this can expose you to that bacteria. *"There's hope,"* says Ms Van Rooyen, *"And it's readily-available in the form of regular hand washing with soap and water. Alternatively, you could sanitise your hands with a good quality sanitiser,"* she adds.

Good old fashioned hand washing beats them all

Washing your hands is the most effective action you can take to prevent bacterial infections from a public bathroom. *"You can remove all gastrointestinal and respiratory infection bacteria by washing hands,"* explains Judy Daly, a world-renowned American clinical microbiologist. Twenty seconds of a little bit of friction, water and soap will really make a huge difference in preventing person-to-person transmission of nasty bacteria and assorted pathogens.

Is it true that women wash their hands more often than men? Yes, says the American Society for Microbiology. A study sponsored by the Society's 'Clean Hands Campaign' recently found that while a satisfactory 77 percent of men and women washed their hands in public restrooms, more women washed their hands than men.