Microbial Contamination of Infant Pacifiers: Are Binkies Making Baby Sick?

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The majority of individuals use an infant pacifier (IP) at some point during their early childhood. The debate as to the pros and cons of IP use is ongoing. Anecdotal evidence would indicate that sanitization of used IPs varies widely. The goal of the present study was to evaluate the level of bacterial contamination of used IPs. Ten used deidentified IPs were collected from infants at a well-baby clinic. Bacteria were cultured from the nipple and the shield areas. The level of contamination was determined using a serial dilution procedure (expressed in colony-forming units/g). The bacterial isolates were speciated using standard laboratory procedures. The results showed marked variations in the level of contamination, with half of the IPs being lightly contaminated and the other half heavily contaminated. The most heavily contaminated IP yielded 2 species of gram-negative bacilli. The second most contaminated IP was populated with gram-positive cocci. These results show that the sanitary condition of used IPs varies widely and may negatively affect the systemic health of the user.

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