

# Infectious diseases A-Z: infants, babies and germs

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It's important to provide a safe and healthy environment for children, especially infants. You should always try to protect children from cigarette smoke, chemical irritants and others hazards, and people who have contagious diseases. But, what about that cookie your baby picked up from the kitchen floor and put in his mouth, or when your little one snuggles with the family dog?

Mayo Clinic [infectious diseases](#) specialist Dr. Prithish Tosh says:

"I think, for a long time, we as a society have been too clean. We are learning more and more about the human microbiome. These are the normal bacteria that inhibit our gut. We used to think these were tenants in our GI tract, but, now, we are learning more and more over the last years that the normal microflora are really important to our immune systems functions. Things can be linked to a really diverse microbiome, and a lot of the bacteria are often gotten during infancy, when kids are rooting around and putting things in their mouth."

Tosh says being a new dad has made him more aware as a doctor about infectious diseases, including children's exposure to the environment.

"As much as it is sort of an impulse to take things that have dropped on the floor and take it out of his mouth, intellectually I'm able to say, 'That's probably not that bad, but, in general, being a little more lax about everything needing to be sterile around the baby."

"And it's probably a good benefit to being exposed to the environment," says Tosh. "We are learning more about this subject every day."

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