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As part of the 2004 Service Area Test, the inspectors examined the sanitary facilities thoroughly. Even when a toilet looks completely clean, it may still harbour many germs. Most non-experts have little idea about the kinds of microscopic organisms that live in these areas. We therefore collected so-called pick-off samples at each service area during both the first and second tests. Agar plates (shallow dishes containing nutrients), are used for this purpose (RODAC – Replicate Organism Detection and Counting); they are used on toilet seats, toilet door handles, and the surfaces of the baby-changing pads in the mother-and-baby rooms to determine microbial population on the respective surface. The nutrients contained in the agar make the bacteria grow, while neutralizing substances also contained in the agar can deactivate any residues of disinfectant.

The samples were packed in cold bags and taken by courier to the medical laboratory of Dr Wimmer and colleagues (member of Synlab, the Association of Freelance Laboratory Physicians) in Augsburg within a maximum of 72 hours. There the plates were incubated at 37°C for 24 hours. The number of germs was then determined. If no growth could be seen on the plate after 24 hours, it was incubated again for another 24 hours at 37°C. The germs were identified by further routine microbiological differentiation steps.

### The Assessment Categories (ACs)

AC 1 – Harmless: many different types of germs were detected, ie environmental germs, skin germs and water germs which usually have very little disease potential. In this category they only occurred in small numbers, ie fewer than 30 CFUs per plate (CFU = colony-forming unit, a measure of the bacterial population).

AC 2 – Indicates a lack of cleaning/hygiene: more than 30 CFUs of all kinds of germs were detected per plate.

AC 3 – Indicates a lack of cleaning/hygiene and a potential hazard to health: pathogenic germs (faecal germs and others) totalling less than 100 CFUs were detected per plate.

AC 4 – Health hazard: large quantities of pathogenic germs were detected, ie a total of more than 100 CFUs per plate.

### The result

	Total	AC 1		AC 2		AC 3		AC 4	
		Number	as %	Number	as %	Number	as %	Number	as %
GT toilet seat	124	26	21	69	55.6	21	16.9	8	6.5
GT door handle	124	53	42.7	59	47.6	10	8.1	2	1.6
Baby-changing table	124	51	41.1	55	44.4	15	12.1	3	2.4
LT toilet seat	62	21	33.9	28	45.2	11	17.7	2	3.2
LT door handle	62	31	50	21	33.9	8	12.9	2	3.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>496</b>	<b>182</b>	<b>36.7</b>	<b>232</b>	<b>46.8</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>13.1</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>3.4</b>

GT= gentlemen's toilets, LT= ladies' toilets







