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WAVY.com experiment uncovers hidden germs lurking in your car

CHESAPEAKE, VA (WAVY.com) -- Life in the fast lane can leave some of us with messy, dirty cars. But is the dirt just disgusting to look at or actually dangerous to your health?

WAVY.com teamed up with a science professor and his class from Tidewater Community College to run an experiment.

We found a Mom with a messy car who agreed to let us use it in our little experiment.



click to play video report.

The team of scientists took samples from "if" spots, including the steering wheel, radio knobs and child seat. We put our findings into Petri dishes and then into an incubator to fester for two days.

What we found looked disgusting. Bacteria was growing in every dish. Most was on the child seat and radio knobs, but we found out the results were not as bad as they looked.

The professor, Dale Horeth, tells us the growth was exactly what he'd expect to find in places we touch.

In fact, Chesapeake Health Department Director Dr. Nancy Welch says we need it.

"We don't want to be in a sterile environment because that would make us more vulnerable whenever the germs change and we would have no protection."

So you can keep the clutter, but Dr. Welch warns just as a cluttered car doesn't necessarily mean infection, a clean car doesn't mean protection.

"Say for example you've had children in the cars with running noses and they're wiping it all over the car handle and the door, those germs you could get on your hands, you bite your nail - bingo you've transmitted it."

The doctor says it's more important to clean your hands than your car.

Which is great news to the woman whose car we borrowed.