

Why kids need exposure to germs

By Lulu Garcia-Navarro, NPR

As a new parent, Jack Gilbert got a lot of different advice on how to properly look after his child: when to give him antibiotics or how often he should sterilize his pacifier, for example.

After the birth of his second child, Gilbert, a scientist who studies microbial ecosystems at the University of Chicago, decided to find out what's actually known about the risks involved when modern-day children come in contact with germs.

"It turned out that most of the exposures were actually beneficial," Gilbert says. "So that dirty pacifier that fell on the floor – if you just stick it in your mouth and lick it, and then pop it back in little Tommy's mouth, it's actually going to stimulate their immune system. Their immune system's going to become stronger because of it."

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