

# Johns Hopkins study: Hands-free faucets harbor germs

BY ERYN BROWN, *Los Angeles Times*

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Hands-free electronic faucets can save a lot of water -- and because you don't have to touch them with your grubby fingers to turn them on, have been assumed to help fight the spread of germs, too.

But a team at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore has discovered that at their facility, electronic faucets were more likely to be contaminated with *Legionella* bacteria than the old-fashioned manual type.

So much more likely that the hospital ripped out the new plumbing in patient care areas and purchased traditional fixtures for new clinical buildings set to open in 2012.

"Newer is not necessarily better when it comes to infection control in hospitals," said Johns Hopkins infectious disease expert Dr. Lisa Maragakis, senior investigator on the research. Initially, the team wasn't seeking to compare faucets. Rather, it planned to test new faucets to see how often they needed to be flushed out with the treated water hospitals use to combat waterborne bacterial infestations.

When it became apparent that automatic faucets harbored far higher levels of *Legionella* than the manual ones, the investigation switched gears. Bacteria were present in 50 percent of water samples from electronic-eye faucets tested, but in only 15 percent of manual faucets tested. It is believed the bacteria counts are higher in the electronic faucets because they have a complicated valve system that is hard to clean.