

Why you might get more than you bargained for playing 'beer pong'

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When the conversation fades and the food runs out, exuberant partygoers might turn to drinking games for their postprandial entertainment. But, be warned the ever-popular sport of "beer pong" could give you a little more than you bargained for, according to US scientists writing in the *International Journal of Food Safety, Nutrition and Public Health*.

Paul Dawson and colleagues at Clemson University in South Carolina explain that "beer pong", also known as "Beirut" usually involves 2 to 12 players bouncing [ping pong](#) balls across a table and attempting to land a ball in one of several cups half filled with beer. Each time a player is successful, an opponent must drink the beer from that cup. Ostensibly the [game](#) offers many of the challenges of other ball games, such as hand-to-eye coordination, hitting targets, volleying tactics, But of course, ultimately, the goal is to raise the level of alcoholic inebriation among the players and as such it has become a popular college campus pastime since its invention in the 1950s. There are, however, serious leagues and even a world championship with a not insignificant monetary prize.

The Clemson team, however, has focused its attention not on the socioeconomics of beer pong but instead on the transmission of [microbial pathogens](#) via the ping pong ball and the repeated imbibing of contaminated beer. During the course of a game, the ball is held in the players hands, lands on work surfaces and floors and, in the outdoor, or barbecue, version of the game may come into contact not only with uncooked meat, but with the ground and perhaps even animal fecal particles present in soil or on lawns.

The team found that most of the microbial species transferred during beer pong were not pathogenic, there was a greater density of microbes transferred during an outdoor game. However, there is nevertheless a risk of infection from players who have latent infection with *Staphylococcus aureus* or *S. pyogenes*, for instance. The transfer of pathogens from fecal particles is always a serious concern. In a parallel study the analysis of ping pong balls used in game play, the team also deliberately inoculated ping pong balls with a non-pathogenic form of the intestinal microbe *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*) in order to see how effectively this microbe might be spread among players during a game. Transfer was 100% the team demonstrated.

One might suggest that partygoers could have a more hygienic experience indulging in more traditional forms of entertainment at a party, such as chatting, dancing or making out...

More information: Dawson, P.L., Han, I.Y., Lynn, D., Bailey, C., Taylor, A. and Martinez-Dawson, R. (2015) 'Bacterial transfer to beverages during drinking games: 'beer pong'', *Int. J. Food Safety, Nutrition and Public Health*, Vol. 5, No. 2, pp.151-161.

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