

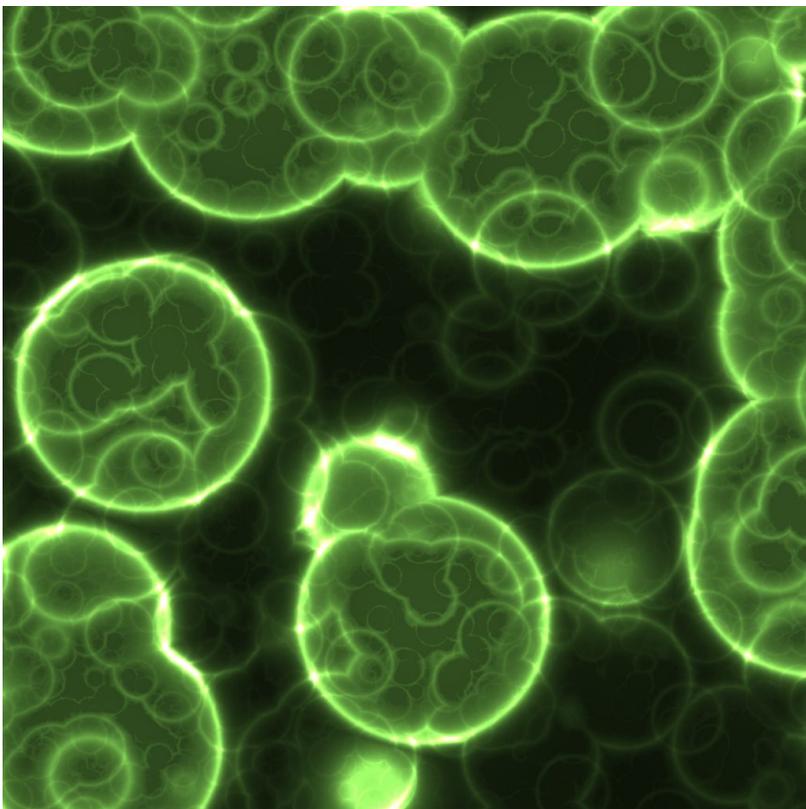
# Say It. Don't Spray It: Contamination and Communal Food

So you go to the birthday party of your nephew. After he blows out the candles you are offered a piece of that cake. Should you accept it? You are at a restaurant and ask the waiter for water with a piece of lemon in your ice water. Are you safe to drink the water even with the straw provided?

What about using a chip in a dip that others have access to? What if others have carried out their habit of "double-dipping?"

Yes, you may say I'm obsessive compulsive, but I have seen through a microscope bacteria moving around on items that were supposed to be "sterile." So let's just analyze the safety of these three scenarios.

## More Than Meets the Eye



Paul Dawson, a food scientist and professor at Clemson University, has made it his mission for over 30 years to understand how common food habits may be increasing the spread of bacteria. Now let me be clear. We are exposed to millions and maybe billions of bacteria daily in the foods we eat, especially if we do not wash our hands with soap before eating. The problem is that more and more bacteria are becoming resistant to antibiotics and therefore more harmful to us through our

gastrointestinal system, especially if our immune system is compromised. Dawson found out that when candles are blown out on a cake, there was 1400% more bacteria on the frosting than on frosting with candles that were not blown out. If the person was developing the early symptoms of a bronchitis, that's 1400 % or 15 times more bacteria that you will be eating, on the medium that bacteria love to grow on, sugar. He also found that lemons contaminated with E. coli and left at room temperature for 24 hours in the usual open containers had an increased bacterial population. Be also careful of the menus you are handling. E. coli survived on them for up to two days.



When double-dipping occurred, salsa had five times more bacteria than the chocolate or cheese dips.

## Simple Precautions

In ending his comments about food safety, Dawson says “ I hope [these studies] make people aware of good hygiene, but I don’t want anyone to be a germaphobe about it”.

This is also my wish. So enjoy the birthday party or the potluck after church. Just remember to wash your hands.