

### BURNING QUESTION

## Can handling money spread germs?



adapted from an article by Heidi Mitchell

- 1 **Money laundering** is typically meant to describe the process of scrubbing funds of their origin. That term could also be applied to the 30 cleaning of *Benjamins*<sup>1)</sup>. According to a recent study, bacteria of many forms cling to dollar bills. One expert, Emily Martin, an assistant professor of epidemiology at the University of Michigan School of Public Health, explains which bugs may be money-hungry and when it's worth worrying about critters in the ATM.
- 2 American paper money is made from a blend of linen and cotton, which make notes porous, with "lots of nooks and crannies for things to get stuck in," says Dr. Martin. As dollars move from person to person, each owner's bacterial signature can be 31 the bill and feast on residual oils from sticky fingers.
- 3 A recent study found more than 3,000 types of bacteria on bills in circulation, though the epidemiologist says most of what was found is part of our world's bacterial ecosystem. "We carry so many bacteria, we are used to fighting them," Dr. Martin says. "Problems arise only when bacteria get into places they shouldn't."
- 4 Among the critters found are the germs that cause acne. The skin cells a person sheds onto inanimate objects are laced with bugs. 33, with little nutritional value in a dollar bill, they can only survive a couple of days on deposited skin scales and oil, Dr. Martin says. "The bacteria you'll find on a bill are more reflective of the last person who touched it than everyone who ever touched it," she says. "Typically the numbers of bacteria found on a bill aren't large enough to cause infection, and these aren't necessarily the same strains that are resistant to antibiotics anyway," Dr. Martin adds. Plus, "our skin is an excellent barrier. Just don't touch anything that's handled often and then touch an open wound or put your hand in your mouth," Dr. Martin says. Washing hands frequently with soap and water should get rid of any residual germs that may hitchhike on bills.
- 5 Dr. Martin runs a lab and is surrounded by germs all day. She doesn't give a second thought to who is riding the coattails of *Abe*, *Andrew* or *Benjamin*. "I'd worry more about what flu virus is being sneezed in your direction," she says.

*Wall Street Journal, 2017*

noot 1 Benjamins verwijst naar biljetten van \$100 met de afbeelding van Benjamin Franklin.