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3OYS Investigates: Bacteria found in bounce houses

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PHOENIX -- They're bouncy. They're jumpy. They're fun. But it's not just kids bouncing and jumping at these popular indoor parks.

"Lots of interesting stuff growing at these places," says Dr. Stan Kikkert, who heads up the Bio Tech program at Mesa Community College.

"After looking at the data, what especially occurred to me was, maybe mucus secretions, kids landing on their face and wiping their noses on the bouncy house," he

says.

3 On Your Side visited several valley indoor jump and bounce house parks, swabbing everything from trampolines to foam blocks. We collected samples from the surfaces where kids, play, jump, bounce and often fall flat on their face.

"One thing that seemed surprising was the clustering and the concentration of the bacteria," he says.

When Dr. Kikkert analyzed our samples he said, "I think the colorful display of bacteria, it seemed like we had a lot of different kinds of bacteria. Looks like there were molds and stuff as well."

Kikkert says it's not surprising places filled with kids are also filled with germs. "Some of those germs could be a virus or a bacteria," he says.

But could the exposure to a variation of bacteria make your kids sick?

"It really depends on the amount of exposure, their own personal immune system, and how good they are about washing their hands after they've played in the bouncy houses."

We talked to a Valley pediatrician about the germ situation. "They don't know about covering their mouth, or even if they do, going and washing their hands or after they touch whatever, going and washing their hands again. So in general, yeah, kids are germy."

"Rather than being fearful, I think being smart about how old your child is, how long you let them play there and cleaning them up afterwards."

Dr. Kikkert compared these indoor play parks to public gyms. He considers both a breeding ground for germs.

"There are a lot more hygiene products available in gyms," he points out. "There are a lot more spray bottles, and people are encouraged to wipe down equipment after they use it."

As for the best way to fight germs, it's pretty simple. Wash your hands before and after you go.

A final piece of advice from Dr. Kikkert? "Whether you're playing in the play area of a restaurant or you're going to a friend's house or at the mall or at a bouncy house, you need to be aware of your surroundings."