

What's in Your Pockets?

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Can the “things” children carry in their pockets make them ill? Adults that frequently launder clothing for small children may be afraid to reach into little pockets for fear of

what may still be alive.

A collection of insects and objects that may end up in small pockets may include:

- Caterpillars
- Roly-poly
- Butterflies
- Pieces of pretty objects
- Flowers
- Leaves
- Bugs
- Rocks
- Feathers

How many of these “things” may be concerning and possibly spread disease or bacteria?

Potentially, all things found could carry bacteria that cause disease. Some of the most obvious dangerous objects that a child should never put in their pocket include pretty pieces of glass because of the risk of serious cuts and infections.

Caterpillars are a popular item because they are generally fuzzy and viewed as pretty. Some caterpillars are poisonous. To find more information and pictures of which caterpillars are poisonous, visit the Univ. of Kentucky, College of Agriculture at www.ca.uky.edu/entomology/entfacts/ef003.asp.



Monarch caterpillars

The roly-poly bug- another name for the Woodlouse—is not poisonous. Roly-poly bugs have 14 legs, making them a crustacean; as opposed to insects which have only six legs.



Pipevine Swallowtail

Monarch and Pipevine Swallowtail butterflies eat poisonous plants as caterpillars and are poisonous themselves as adult butterflies. Birds learn not to eat them.



Monarch

Flowers and leaves may or may not be dangerous and can cause three occurrences – skin irritation, eye irritation and poisoning. Each flower and leaf should be evaluated separately. For more information about the flowers and leaves that are poisonous visit http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/lawn_garden/poison/poison.html.

Feathers from birds are readily found on most walking trails and parks and can end up in pockets. Feathers have been known to carry lice and chiggers but whether they are still there or alive is dependent on where the feathers are found and the type of weather exposure. Generally, lice and chiggers will leave a feather after a few days of sun exposure. Bird feathers, as well as birds can carry other diseases that cause illness. A person's age and health status may affect his or her immune system and increasing the chances of getting sick. People who are more likely to get diseases from birds include infants, children younger than five years old, organ transplant patients, people with HIV/AIDS and people being treated for cancer. More information can be found at www.cdc.gov/healthypets/animals/birds.htm.

The best protection one can have relating to “pocket objects” is to teach small children to keep pocket objects away from their face and wash their hands with soap and water after collecting. If they are bitten or stung, teach them to tell you about it and observe the markings on the insect or crawler.

Anyone doing the laundry and finding collectables should also wash their hands with soap and water. Walking with your child when they are on a collecting mission is a great way to not only teach them safety in handling unfamiliar or interesting objects, but also improve physical, mental and relational health.