

# Dishing the dirt on kids



I WANT to raise my children dirty. Not Christina Aguilera dirty, just regular don't-have-to-wash-hands-every-five-minutes dirty. The kind of dirty I was raised on.

Ever since I became a dad three years ago to my Spawn, then a month ago to Spawnette, I've had to carry a mini arsenal of germ-busting weapons where ever the Spawn went.

Anti-bacterial wipes, hand sanitiser and face wipes were just some of the gear I had to lug around.

Not willingly, though.

You see, I've had this long-running debate with my wife over the need to be so clean ALL THE TIME.

She wipes down the baby chair before the Spawn sits on it (just in case the germs there have developed pant-penetration technology), then the table, then his hands again whenever he touches the table after the initial wipe.

If you don't do it, he'll get sick, she would reason.

And I'd blow her off by telling her Spawn is three and going to eat a prata, not perform a splenectomy. (Of course, I told her off in my brain, not out loud. I'm practical, not insane.)

If it were up to me, I'd just plonk him down and let

him fend for himself against the germs. If he wins, great. But if they win, well, they win only once.

I call it the Inoculation Method.

You don't need a doctor to spell it out – if you don't expose your body to viruses and bacteria, then how would your body learn to fight them off?

## In the past

I'm pretty sure in the days before mums carried around weapons-grade anti-bacterial wipes, kids survived whatever unseen dangers that attached themselves to their hands when they touched hawkker centre tables just fine.

Yes, germs are getting scarier these days. You have H1N1, Sars, HFMD, and a billion other germs that are so scary, we need abbreviations to refer to them lest people flee after hearing their real names.

But that just means we have to train our bodies harder to fight them.

I don't mean we should go spritz some diluted ebola virus on our children for the sake of it.

But just some sparring with the stuff you find on everyday dirt and grime ought to go a long way in beefing up the immune system for when it really gets into trouble.

I like to think that that's how I maintained my streak of not taking a single day of sick leave in a decade of working life.

No virus or bacteria stood a fighting chance against the immune system I trained.



ST FILE PICTURE

**IT TAKES TWO:** Our writer feels that besides using cleaning agents, we also need to beef up our immune system to fight against bacteria.

I didn't wash my hands before (or after) meals. I ate food off the floor. I didn't flinch when someone sneezed in my direction.

Then one day last year, it happened.

I trotted out of the office clinic, snot on my sleeve, MC in my hand.

Flu was the diagnosis.

The irony? I had caught it from my son.