



spotlight on health

Public Health Studies: Science Fact Or Science Fiction?

by *Steven J. Milloy*

(NAPSA)—Is chocolate good for your heart? Are we too clean? Do cell phones cause brain tumors? As a bio-statistician, public health researcher and founder of *Junk science.com*, I see consumers being bombarded with health information on a daily basis.

While it's tempting to believe everything you hear, people should know that, contrary to popular belief, not all science is sound science. In fact, a lot of it is junk science.

So, what is junk science? It's the use of unproven scientific data to further a 'behind-the-scenes' agenda, which affects consumer behavior, spending, and peace of mind.

Junk science is often used to make questionable claims publicly before the scientific community can test the theories.

One good example is a recent, well-publicized study linking antibacterial use and the creation of "supergerms." The study alleges that many types of antibacterial household products cause antibiotic-resistant bacteria. What the public doesn't realize is that the theory is based on just *one* laboratory-controlled study using triclosan-based antibacterial soap. One study is inconclusive and triclosan is not present in most household antibacterial cleaning products.

So, how can consumers tell science fact from science fiction? Some clues include:

- Scientific Data Based on a Single Study: Studies need to be



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performed repeatedly by the scientific community before a solid conclusion can be made.

- Heavy Reliance on Statistics: Statistics are often subject to manipulation.

- An Urgent Warning to Act Now: Beware of false warnings designed to change consumer behavior.

In addition to the above rules, exercise your own judgement, conduct further research, and consult your doctor before taking action on a health claim.

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