**Listening, “Is It Possible to Be Too Clean” from *Q: Skills for Success, Listening and Speaking 2***

“You have to eat a lot of dirt before you die.” That’s one of my grandmother’s old sayings. She used to say that to my mother when, as a small child, I picked up a cookie from the floor and ate it. Or in the words of another old saying, “A little dirt never hurt anybody.” These sound like very old-fashioned words these days. People now worry a lot about personal cleanliness and dirt and germs. They use special soaps that kill germs and carry hand sanitizers in their pockets. Public bathrooms have electric towel machines and doors that open automatically so you don’t have to touch anything.

Some of these “clean ideas” are sensible, but research shows that we may be taking this too far. Perhaps our grandmothers were right. We shouldn’t worry so much about a little dirt.

It’s not only that a little dirt doesn’t hurt us. It might even be good for us. No one is saying that we should stop bathing or cleaning our houses, but research shows that a little contact with dirt, germs, and bacteria helps children develop their immune systems – our bodies’ natural defense against disease.

Studies in Germany in the 1980s compared two groups of children. One group lived on farms, had pets, and was around a lot of other children. The second group lived in the city, had no pets, and spent little time with other kids. The children in the second group were also cleaner. They washed their hands many times each day and often took more than one bath a day. Researchers found that children in the first group were healthier and had fewer allergies than the children in the second group. It seems that this natural contact with the “world around them” was in fact good for children in the first group.

Asthma is a serious disease that often affects children and adults. The disease makes it difficult for a person to breathe. There are many possible causes for asthma. However, researchers believe that one cause might be the lack of contact with normal bacteria as a child. In Australia, some children with asthma are actually taking “dirt pills” with some bacteria they missed out on as babies.

We need to realize that not all bacteria cause disease. Some bacteria are good for us. For example, they help us digest our food. Bacteria help gardeners make compost to improve their gardens. Without bacteria, there can be no life on the planet.

One researcher put it like this: “I’m not saying we should be more dirty. I’m saying we should be less clean.”

**Listening for facts and opinions, from *Q: Skills for Success, Listening and Speaking 2***

1. You know this PlayPump makes a nice little story, but it seems to me that this project is too small. Something like this can never solve Africa’s water problems. We should look for more serious ideas.
2. I read another article about the PlayPumps. Did you know that there are more than 1000 PlayPumps in Africa and that they provide water for more than a million people?
3. I think PlayPumps are just another form of child labor. In most places, this kind of thing is against the law. I say they shouldn’t use children to pump water for the community.
4. In many of these communities, the children had to walk five or six hours a day to get water for their families. Now with the PlayPumps, they can get 370 gallons of water in one hour.
5. I heard a comment from one of the women in a community with a PlayPump. She used to leave her home early every morning and go a long way to look for water. Now she doesn’t have to do that. She says, “Now my back and feet don’t hurt.”
6. I think that most of us agree that the PlayPumps are a wonderful idea and that they can do a lot to solve water problems not just in African but in other countries as well.