

PRO RIDER

GERM WARFARE!

Words: 'Dr' Mark Jones/Pro Rider

Ever gone to get your riding gear out of the cupboard only to have your senses overwhelmed with the smell of festering bugs and your once fave garment now growing a new strain on fungus? Mark looks at what you need to do before retiring your gear for the season.

We had a great summer and are likely beginning to think about adding extra layers to our riding gear as winter sneaks up on us – bugger! You may be lucky enough to have a whole separate 'wardrobe' of kit. But before the mesh vests, vented jackets, shorty boots and summer gloves are chucked into a corner somewhere, or the cold weather kit is dragged out from a cupboard it was stuffed in a few months ago to put on for a ride, it might be a good idea to engage in a bit of germ warfare!

Until last year, germs may have been of passing interest, but we are now all armchair experts in viruses, at least one: SARS-Cov-2, aka COVID-19. Let's just take a look at what we are talking about and why we need to pay attention to germs before they pay too much attention to us!

Basically, we are surrounded by bacteria and viruses, many living on our skin and inside of us, causing no harm whatsoever as our immune system and other biological trickery stops them from making us

sick. Bacteria are tiny things at around 1-2 microns in diameter (a human hair is a massive 75 microns in comparison), and viruses are 100 times smaller! Stands to reason the only time we get to know about their existence is when they overwhelm our body's defences and make us unwell. When this happens, these microorganisms are 'pathogenic' – 'pathogenic microorganisms' gets shortened to 'germs' for convenience sake. Only a few of the hundreds of thousands of bacterial germs cause infections and, thankfully, can generally be taken out with antibiotics if our bodies can't handle them. Viruses, on the other hand (yep, like that one!) are parasites and take over our cells to make more and more of themselves with potential for all sorts of nasty consequences as our immune response kicks into action, causing inflammation such as we see damaging the lungs of COVID victims.

Anyhow, this isn't a biology lesson, but suffice to say we would be wise to reduce the germ count on our kit, and a good clean with soap and water will wash off bacteria and take out a good many viruses, including COVID-19.

Take a read of the cleaning instructions on your riding gear before getting stuck in, although it's likely a mild cleaning solution of soap and water will do the trick. Before

washing your gear, remove any padding/thermal layers. Some of the material used for padding may need to be washed in a different way from the riding jacket or pants. Prolonged soaking can also damage some of this material – so, read the instructions.

Decent kit like the jacket and pants are actually designed to be washed regularly – really! It's just important to follow the cleaning instructions of the garment. That's why much of the protective padding/armour is removable. When you take this out, check for any wear and tear too. If this seemed a daunting task previously, taking up valuable riding time, it really isn't. Just turn your pants and jacket inside out, fossick around for the pockets holding the armour or padding, which usually have a Velcro or zip fastener, and



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gently pull it out. Remember which bit came from where to make things easier getting it all back in. This may be a good opportunity for an upgrade to higher spec options, too, and worth a chat with your favourite supplier to see if there is anything better available than when you first bought your kit.

Armour removed, if you've got modern kit with a breathable/waterproof membrane, then it's safest to use a dedicated technical washing powder which you'll find at any good bike shop. And if the instructions for your gear require a fresh coat of waterproofing, then be sure to apply that as well. This will either come in the form of a powder you can add to the wash or a spray which you'll need to apply after the garment is clean and dry.

And don't forget your lid – most helmets these days come with removable padding. You can tell if there are clips or buttons securing these padded areas to the helmet. If you don't find these underneath the padding, chances are, your liners are non-removable. These are best cleaned with a damp cloth. There are proprietary helmet spray cleaners available – again, speak to your supplier.

Our awareness of germs has become heightened of late, but aside from COVID-19, they have always been lurking in the background, and we need to do what we can to neutralise them before they become a risk. A simple riding gear maintenance programme should be as important as the one we have for our bikes. Remember to read the instructions, and keeping your kit ready to go or to put in storage should be no drama.

As for that mouldy leather jacket from your misspent youth – that fungus has risks too. Soap and water will work there, followed up with leather treatment easily obtained from your friendly horsey shop. If its growing mushrooms, though – remember the past for what it was and chuck it in the bin! ■■■

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