



Live Well, Work Well

Health and wellness tips for your work, home and life—brought to you by the insurance professionals at Veritas Risk Services

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OFFICE GERMS

The typical employee's desk has more bacteria per square inch than an office toilet seat. If that's not disturbing enough, desks, phones and other private surfaces are also prime habitats for the viruses and bacteria that cause colds, the flu, strep throat, pneumonia and other illnesses.

Germs are bacteria, viruses, fungi and parasites. Not all will cause disease, but many are bad news in the workplace, as some can live from 2 to 72 hours or more on hard surfaces. Germs are then spread in one of the following ways:

- Infectious droplets from coughs or sneezes move through the air and land on nearby surfaces or are inhaled by others.
- Physical contact is made with infected droplets on a hard surface (e.g., a desk) and is transferred by touching the mouth, eyes or nose prior to hand washing.

Germ Hot Spots

- Telephones
- Keyboard and mouse
- Desktops
- Doorknobs, elevator buttons and light switches
- Vending machine buttons
- Fax, printer and copy machines
- Water fountain handles and water cooler spigots
- Microwave door handles
- Bathroom door handles and faucets
- Chair armrests
- Pens and other shared office items

- Escalator and elevator handrails

Tidy vs. Clean

Even if you keep your desk tidy, it may not be "clean." Unlike toilets, which tend to be cleaned regularly; keyboards, phone receivers and desks rarely receive a wipe-down. Consider this: crumbs and coffee spills are capable of supporting mini eco-systems. Without a cleaning, even a small area on your desk or phone can sustain millions of bacteria that could potentially cause illness.

Getting Rid of Germs

The good news: heightened awareness and hygiene efforts can go a long way in helping keep your office safer. Keep the following points in mind and share them with your co-workers:

- Germ-busting at the office is a team effort! It only takes one person to infect healthy co-workers.
- Regular cleaning of personal workspaces (desk, phone, keyboard, etc.) kills bacteria, stopping the spread of germs.
- Frequent cleaning of shared workspaces (door handles, coffee pots, light switches, faucets, office equipment, etc.) is essential in maintaining sanitary safety. Disinfection is the goal, so be sure to use a true disinfectant, not simply an antibacterial product. Daily disinfection reduces bacteria levels by 99 percent, drastically lowering the risk of illness.
- Be considerate of others and cough or sneeze into tissues, your sleeve or the crook of your arm. Wash your hands often and sanitize using alcohol-based disposable hand wipes or gel. Consider having these items on-hand at your desk and in any common areas, including kitchens and restrooms.