



**OFFICE CLEANLINESS**

An increasing number of people are now using their office as an unregulated restaurant having breakfast, coffee breaks and lunch at their desks. In most cases, proper and adequate cleaning methods of the desk area where this food has been consumed is not carried out which can lead to employees eating more than they can stomach. Bacteria inhabits our skin and mucus membranes at all times and if it gets in touch with food that is left at room temperature for a couple of hours it can cause food poisoning.

A recent US study showed the average desk harbours 400 times more disease-triggering dirt than a toilet seat with bacteria levels on the typical office fax machine three times higher than on the bathroom door !. A poll in the UK found that only 1 in 10 people cleans their desk, keyboard or phone, creating a breeding ground for harmful germs and bacteria.

Research from the University of Arizona pinpoints the worst areas for bacteria in the office as follows:

PIECE OF EQUIPMENT/AREA	GERMS PER SQUARE INCH
Phone	25,127
Desktop	20,961
Keyboard	3,295
Mouse	1,676
Toilet seat	49

The above research was carried out by Dr. Charles Gerba whose team collected samples three times daily from 12 office surfaces in several locations using technology such as ultraviolet germ markers. His study reveals that bacteria levels climb during the day, even on tidy desks.

When someone is infected with a cold or flu bug, the surfaces they touch during the day become germ transfer points because some cold and flu viruses can survive for up to 72 hours. An office can therefore become an incubator. Because of this, office equipment should be regularly disinfected to prevent the spread of viruses and bacteria responsible for disease (e.g. use of bacterial wipes).

The situation is exacerbated in businesses that have hotdesking policies where more than one person regularly uses a particular work site/desk. Using a phone after a colleague has sneezed or coughed into it could cause another employee to be on the receiving end of their germs as pathogens in their saliva can be spread through the mucus membranes of the mouth and eyes.

Keeping workstations clean is a matter of common sense and good hygiene. Most bugs can be removed by soap and hot water or disinfectant wipes. Antibacterial wipes should be used on a regular basis for the phone, keyboard and mouse. Employees should also be advised to wash their hands both before and after eating and be conscious of what the desks they are sitting at are used for – especially in businesses that have hotdesking policies where more than one person uses a particular ‘spare’ desk. .

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