

Germs in the Workplace

Sometimes we get sick of working, but what about when we get sick at work? Since the office is filled with surfaces that everyone shares, germs can easily spread through cross-contamination which is the transfer of germs from one surface, food or person to another. The average adult catches two to four colds a year, resulting in millions of lost workdays. Millions of people in the United States—about 5% to 20% of U.S. residents—will get influenza each year. To help you stay healthy in the office or at your school, follow these tips:

- **Handwashing** - Proper handwashing is the best way to avoid spreading germs. Rub your hands together with soap and water for at least 15 seconds. Rinse your hands thoroughly and dry them completely using a clean paper towel to help wipe up and throw away germs. Use a paper towel to turn off faucets to avoid re-contaminating your hands. Alcohol based hand sanitizers can be substituted when soap and water are not available.
- **Work Spaces** - Help remove germs in your personal work environment by wiping surfaces frequently with paper towels and disinfectant for added protection. The telephone, keyboard, computer mouse and doorknobs are surfaces that are important to keep clean since they are frequently touched by you and your co-workers. The fax and copier machine as well as other communally shared equipment can expose you to germs from many people. Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth when you come in contact with any of these areas. Proper handwashing throughout the day and especially before eating can help reduce your risk of becoming ill.
- **Office Supplies** - Keep items like pencils and pens out of your mouth. Germs that are present on these items can easily spread to your hands and mouth, potentially making you sick.
- **Sick Days** - Cover your mouth with disposable paper products when sneezing or coughing. Use paper tissues, towels or napkins to help prevent germs from spreading to your hands. Always wash your hands or use hand sanitizer afterwards. Your cold is most infectious during the first few days. If possible, **stay at home** during this time to avoid exposing your co-workers to your germs. Since a cold or flu may be contagious for as long as 5-10 days after you first experience symptoms, be especially aware of proper hygiene practices during this time. Keep in mind that germs can easily spread because of cross-contamination in close quarters.
- **Lunch Time** - Use paper towels to wipe the tops of canned goods, soda and juice to help remove potentially contaminating microorganisms before you open them. All produce should be rinsed and wiped with paper towels or napkins to help remove germs before eating. Laboratory tests show that rinsing an apple with water may only remove about 75% of contaminating germs, while rinsing and drying with a paper product can remove up to 99%. Use a paper towel to provide a barrier if you eat on your desk.

Resources/Content Citing: