



Food Safety & Nutrition

Germs In the Workplace!



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An average office is well staffed – with an army of germs!! This according to a recent study conducted by the University of Arizona on germs in the workplace.

The study was designed to identify the surfaces with the highest levels of contamination and to measure the effectiveness of a disinfecting routine to reduce illness-causing germs in the workplace.

Bacterial samples were collected from common spaces and personal areas, such as offices and cubicles. Results indicated that personal spaces harbored the most bacteria. The number one culprit was the telephone, followed by the desktop. The average desktop has more bacteria than any surface tested in the bathroom. The area where hands rest on the desk has, on average, 10 million bacteria!! This says that we should be washing our hands very often and the tops of our desks.

The next three bacteria harboring areas, in descending order were water fountain handles, microwave door handles and keyboards.

Common areas, including lunch tables, rated much lower because they are usually cleaned and disinfected daily, particularly where there is a cleaning staff. Toilet seats and photocopier surfaces were the least contaminated sites in all offices.

During the study, one group was given a disinfectant wipe or spray to routinely clean surfaces in the offices. Among those who used disinfectant to clean their desks and common areas, microorganisms were reduced 99 percent or more.

Proper use of disinfectants will increase its benefits. Please remember to read the label on the product and use it according to the manufacturer's directions. If using a spray, wipe with paper towels, and change the towels frequently to avoid spreading bacteria from one surface to another.

Another place that many office workers deal with microorganisms is in the office refrigerator!! Many of us probably have many chilling tales about office refrigerators! Mine includes finding frozen slugs next to the frozen juice. It was part of a contest to see who could bring in the largest slug – they had to be frozen to be able to measure them accurately!

Many people bring in food for lunches, snacks or office gatherings and then forget to take home the leftovers or clean out the refrigerator. An office refrigerator should be cleaned out once a week or so. It is also wise to have a few simple refrigerator safety polices. One may be to have markers and tape available near the refrigerator so that everyone can mark their name and date on the containers so they can be reminded about cleaning it out. Another is to mark food that is for anyone who wants it, along with a date it was put into the refrigerator. In addition, place

a note on the outside of the refrigerator saying there is food in the refrigerator marked for anyone who wants it. It may get eaten much more quickly.

Most food that is put in the refrigerator for lunches snacks or as leftovers will keep safely for a maximum of 1-4 days. Therefore, food should not been seen left for more than a week.

For a complete guide to storage times for food in the refrigerator or for more information on food storage, contact the WSU Cooperative Extension office at 397-6060 ext. 0.
