

## DON'T LET GERMS WORK IN YOUR SPACE

You wouldn't eat your lunch in a washroom stall, but germ experts tell us this might be a better bet than your office desk. In a study conducted by infectious disease expert Dr. Charles Gerba of the University of Arizona, researchers found that the average office desktop harbours a staggering 400 times more bacteria than the average toilet seat.

Other common bacteria "hot spots" include keyboards, mice, telephone receivers, light switches, faucets, refrigerator handles, and vending machine buttons. Viruses can survive on these surfaces for up to three days, patiently waiting to be picked up by a comfortable human host.

Personal office space and equipment is generally off-limits to cleaners thereby putting the onus on employees to clean their own workspace. But how often do you really disinfect your calculator? If the answer is not very often, then you likely won't want to know that the average work desk is home to 20,000 germs per square inch.

Office germs are taking their toll. According to the website of the Victorian Order of Nurses, 7.5 million workdays are lost in Canada every year due to the flu alone. While flu shots are a powerful weapon, they are only a partial answer to the many "bugs", such as common cold viruses, that inhabit offices 365 days a year.

Companies like Staples Advantage, the business-to-business division of Staples, offer a range of hand sanitizers, sprays, wipes and kitchen cleaners that make it easy for employees to play a part in keeping the office germ-free. By using these products to clean affected surfaces on a regular basis, employees can reduce common office illnesses by as much as 80%, according to a recent study sponsored by Kimberly-Clark.

"Arming your employees with the tools to maintain a clean workspace is the best course of action to stop the spread of diseases throughout the workplace," says Michael Zahra, President of Staples Advantage. "To help promote best practices, we've developed a website with information, a telling video on just how easily and quickly germs can spread, and we're even giving away some cleaning samples until March 31 to encourage people to maintain a healthy workplace."

The site can be found at [www.staplesadvantage.ca/germs](http://www.staplesadvantage.ca/germs).

Every employee can and should play a role in keeping office bacteria under control. A few simple steps will go a long way in maintaining a clean and healthy office environment.

### **Sidebar:**

Here are a few tips for enlisting employees in the war against office bacteria:

- Create an office "clean team" to educate employees about wiping and spraying germ hot spots.
- Have HR keep track of days lost to cold or flu, and set a target for improvement over the previous year's numbers.
- Put up posters to remind employees about clean office practices.
- Move cleaning products from the cleaning closet into the regular supply closet.

- Have management set the example by participating in swabbing activities.